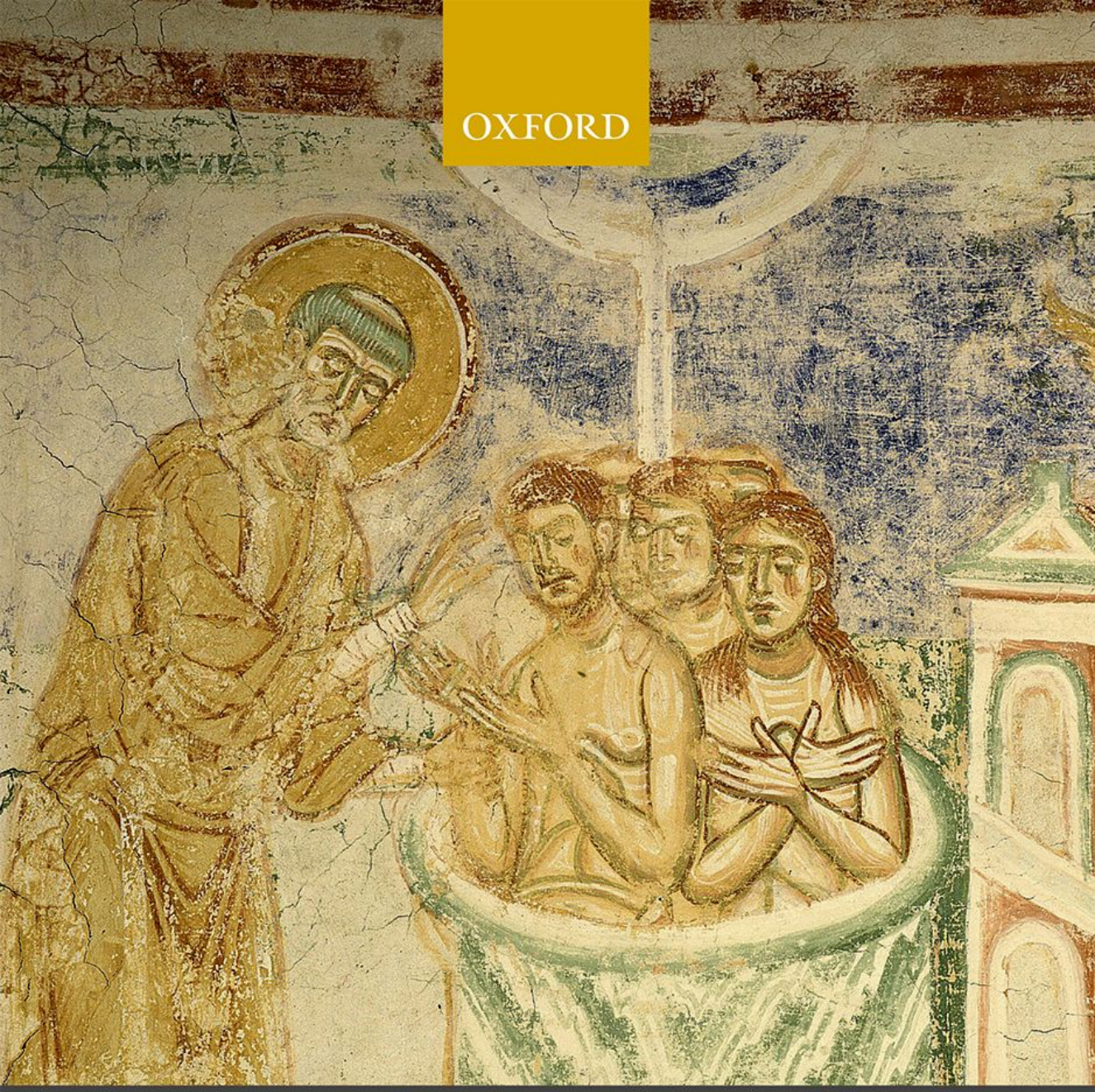

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# PURITY, COMMUNITY, AND RITUAL IN EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

*Moshe Blidstein*

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# Purity, Community, and Ritual in Early Christian Literature

MOSHE BLIDSTEIN

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# Part I

# Purity in its Contexts

# 1

# Introducing Purity Discourses

This book examines the meanings of purification practices and purity concepts in early Christian culture, as they were articulated and formed by Christian authors of the first three centuries, from Paul to Origen. Concepts and practices of purity and defilement shaped the understanding of human nature, sin, history, and ritual in early Christian communities. Purity and defilement were instrumental for articulating difference, hierarchy, and change in these communities. These concepts were central for answering many of the key questions for which Christians of the first centuries sought answers: What is the difference between Christians and non-Christians? How can a pagan or a Jew become a Christian? What happens when a person sins, and how can sin be allayed? In parallel, the major Christian practices embodying difference and change, baptism, abstinence from food or sexual activity, were all understood, felt, and shaped as instances of purification.

The Christian purity practices and concepts which emerged in this period had much in common with those of Greco-Roman religions and Judaism, but were nevertheless innovative on many fronts. Purity served all ancient religions to negotiate the difference between the divine and human realm, to construct borders between social groups, and to signify and embody changes people underwent in their lives. But while Christians, too, used purity and defilement to address these issues, there was a real shift in what purity meant, which can be seen both in practice and in discourse. This interplay between continuity and change in Christian purity practices and discourse is the subject of this book.

## SCHOLARLY NEGLECT

Despite the importance of purity and defilement for early Christian thought and practice, there is little scholarship to date which explores the development of these concepts. While purity and defilement in the Gospels and Paul were thoroughly investigated in the past decades, and there are a significant number

of studies which discuss various purity aspects in the first three Christian centuries,[1] there is no scholarly work which investigates Christian purity and defilement in the second and third centuries across several domains. In works which are dedicated to baptism or to sexual abstinence, two fields in which purity language is prominent and which are relatively well-studied, purity is rarely singled out for study. Even in scholarly literature on the body in early Christianity, a field greatly developed in the past decades, purity and defilement do not receive sustained discussion, especially in the ante-Nicene period.[2] Thus, despite its centrality, purity is treated as an ad hoc concept accompanying other concepts such as *askesis*, abstinence, and sin, and not understood in its own right. Furthermore, little connection is made between purity as understood in different domains of Christian writing: in anti-Jewish polemics on the dietary laws, in discussions of Christian rituals, and in exhortations and arguments about sexuality. The separation of domains is exacerbated by the common translation of ἁγνεία when appearing in a sexual context as "chastity," rather than "purity" or "holiness"; this translation, while not erroneous, conceals the broader connotations of the term. It appears that purity and defilement are rarely seen as relevant concepts for Christianity beyond the first century and before the Middle Ages, i.e., in late antiquity.[3]

How did this situation come about? To a great extent, it is the legacy of the Church Fathers themselves. The formation of Christian belief and ritual in the first centuries took place in fierce polemic against other religions, their beliefs and their rituals, and purity is no exception. Explicit discussions of purity and defilement in the church fathers typically occur in a polemical context, and therefore their main motivation was to demonstrate the superiority of their own purity conceptions relative to other religious groups. Purity rituals of others were singled out as prime examples for irrelevant and insignificant rituals, to which true worship and ritual should be opposed. Christian purity concepts were cast as spiritual and moral, concerning only purification from sin; those of other religions as corporeal and external, concerning only purification from bodily defilement. An explicit discussion of the bodily aspects of Christian purity ritual would have been detrimental to these polemical interests.

[1] On dietary laws and the relationship to Judaism: Tomson (1999); Freidenreich (2011), 85–128; on social construction and order: Maier (1993); Penn (2005); on death defilement: Uro (2013); on baptism: Filoramo (1999); Stroumsa (1999), 268–81; Bovon (2000); on sexuality: Crouzel (1963), 44–65; Brown (1988), 1–208; Fonrobert (2000), 160–209; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 77–128; Vuong (2010); on alimentary asceticism: McGowan (1999a); on purity of heart: Raasch (1966, 1968).

[2] The fourth century, with its wealth of ascetic phenomena and associated texts, is in a somewhat better situation: see Brakke (1995); Shaw (1998); Clark, E. (1999); Clark, G. (2011).

[3] This attitude is exemplified also in recent scholarship. For example, in a volume of essays on purity in the ancient world (Frevel and Nihan [2013a]), the latest essays concern Rome and Second Temple Judaism; in a sequel volume in the same series, titled "Purity in Transcultural Perspective" (Bley et al. [2015]), the earliest essays are on the early medieval period.

Such polemical formulations, which understood purity rituals to be simply irrelevant for Christians, were largely followed in the past by scholars of Christianity.[4] Recent work has shown that the Gospels and Paul's letters, rather than simply rejecting ritual impurity, reflect its complex negotiation, drawing upon earlier traditions of relating to moral and ritual impurity. However, this revisionist perspective rarely goes beyond the first century, and so second- and third-century texts are still seen on the background of a simplistic notion of supersessionism, understanding early Christians to be devoid of ideas and practices of ritual purity. This is unjustified: second- and third-century polemics on purity show that purity was open for negotiation at a later period as well. Early Christian writers had to persuade their readers that their purification practices were more efficacious and significant than those of others. The polemics thus served as an impetus for the articulation of theories of purity and purification, which explained how a person could only be truly purified through Christian practice and belief. These theories, and the tensions which they respond to, are one of the recurrent themes of this book.

The polemical discussions are commonly taken to be the early Christian message on purity, to the detriment of the implicit Christian discourse on the subject, which was no less significant. Terms and images of purity and defilement are ubiquitous in early Christian writings, but they are usually a backdrop to the issues being developed, the idiom of the discussion and not its object.[5] Thus, precisely because purity pervaded the thought world of Christian writers, it was generally taken for a given. This implicit purity discourse constitutes a better vantage point for discerning the writers' *habitus*, their non-reflective practices embodying their principles, than their explicit, polemical purity discourse.[6]

## PURITY PRACTICE AND PURITY DISCOURSE

Rules of purity and defilement are found in all cultures, though there is immense variety in the objects or actions seen as defiling, as well as the means of purification. The most influential general theory concerning rules of purity and

[4] Hübner (1992) is an extreme example: "Cleanness is no longer understood as cultic/ritual in the NT, rather as ethical/soteriological, and soteriological/sacramental. Therefore, over against the OT and ancient thought . . . a radically new understanding of reality for the relation of God to humanity is gained. There emerges an opposing force in the NT that . . . in the Patristic period has a disastrous effect and renews reactionary thinking in the categories of uncleanness and cleanness once overcome by Jesus."

[5] For purity as an idiom, see Valeri (2000), 112–13.

[6] For the primacy of *habitus* compared to conscious articulated discourse, see Bourdieu (1990), 52–97.

defilement is Mary Douglas' structural-symbolic theory, first put forward in her book *Purity and Danger*.[7] For Douglas, defilement is found in the ambiguous areas in and near the margins of society's structures, and, in parallel, in and near the margins of structural forms, primarily the human body.[8] In her theory, purity rules are explained through their social function, which is to maintain the structures of society, thought, and body by marking their margins and ambiguities. In a further publication, *Natural Symbols*, Douglas attempted to align different types of social groups and societies with different types of rituals practiced in these societies.[9] For example, a highly hierarchical society with strong internal social control will practice rigorous purity rituals symbolizing the internal social hierarchy; moral purity is expressed by ritual purity. In contrast, a small, competitive group attempting to differentiate itself from society at large will practice different types of ritual, which construct the external boundaries of the body but pay less attention to the internal hierarchy; witchcraft is extensively feared, a reflection of the fear of the group from society at large.[10]

For the purposes of my study, Douglas' theory is helpful only to a limited extent. Her insights on the symbolic links between individual and collective body, namely that the body of the person parallels the social body, and that concerns about defining the borders of the former reflect and/or embody concerns about the borders and identity of the latter, must be examined by any study dealing with historical aspects of the human body. Furthermore, the more precise correlations identified in *Natural Symbols* are informative as possible backgrounds for various types of purity rituals and beliefs. However, Douglas' functionalist theory has been criticized for its lack of appreciation of historical diversity and change and the primacy it gives to the social dimension over individual, cognitive, and ideational dimensions.[11] The correlation of purity theories to social realities requires a "thick description" of the social situation in the maelstrom of early Christian movements and groups, sadly unavailable to the modern historian. Furthermore, the details of her theory simply do not hold up in the historical situation of early Christianity. In a masterful article on the attitudes towards nocturnal emissions in the third- to fifth-century church, David Brakke had similar findings:

> While Douglas' formulation above provides the right questions for our study, a direct correlation between greater need to define social boundaries and greater

[7] Douglas (2002 [1966]). In later work published by Douglas in the 1990s, she has changed her perspective on several crucial questions; however, her earlier work is much more influential and is seen as her major contribution to the discussion.

[8] Douglas (2002 [1966]), esp. 115–22. [9] Douglas (2003 [1969]).

[10] The first example is of what Douglas calls high grid and high group, the second of low grid and high group. My description is of course highly condensed and does not do justice to the complexity of the theory. For different versions of Douglas' theory and discussion, see Spickard (1989).

[11] See Jenson (1992), 76–8; Beard (1995); Valeri (2000), 70–83; Bradley (2012); Frevel and Nihan (2013b), 6–9. For criticism of functionalism as a tool for analysis of ancient ritual and a plea for attention to the interpretations given by ancient authors, see Johnston (2008), 469–72.

> anxiety about the integrity of the individual body does not obtain. Particularly when the group against which a community wishes to define itself is perceived to have such strong purity concerns, the lack of such concerns can become a mode of tight self-definition.[12]

Therefore, rather than correlate early Christian evidence to a general social theory, I seek to place the transformations occurring in purity conceptions and the conflicts about them in historical context and to understand their relationship to the textual and practical traditions of purity from which they have sprung. The turn from the general to the particular is in accordance with the "recent scholarly trend [ . . . ] to focus on the internal mechanisms of purity systems within specific communities, and the impact of those systems on a community's activities, beliefs and traditions;"[13] or, in the words of a recent study of pollution and Greek tragedy, to "[abandon] the idea of definition of essence ('what it is') in favour of a focus on description, 'how it is'."[14]

An alternative methodological approach developed over the past decades is of defilement as arising not from an artificial or culture-driven structure, but rather from a biological reaction of disgust towards certain actions and substances, even if mediated by culture. This direction offers a compelling framework for explaining how morality is embodied and emotionally created and expressed through practices of purity and defilement.[15] According to many contemporary studies, the disgust response is a basic and universal emotion with unique bodily and neurological characteristics, manifested, for example, in a specific facial expression. It is claimed that the disgust response is a mechanism which evolved to protect humans from infections by pathogens. As such, the core disgust elicitors are excrement and corpses, with disgust awakened especially by the proximity of such substances to the skin or orifices, and ameliorated by washing them off. So far, the parallel between disgust and pollution beliefs and practices is clear. However, beyond this core there is a wide and varied field of substances and actions which may elicit disgust: various foods, animals, body products, sexual acts, poor hygiene, as well as grossly immoral actions and strange or unusual activities in general. All of these vary widely between cultures and even individuals, as do the cultural mechanisms and rituals created to manage disgust. Even in the case of core disgust elicitors, different cultures may express and manage disgust very differently. Among these variations, disgust may or may not be expressed through rituals; when rituals exist, these vary immensely in their centrality and intensity. In other words,

[12] Brakke (1995), 421; Gager (1982) believes Douglas' theory on the social meaning of body–soul relationships is directly relevant to early Christian doctrines on resurrection, incarnation, and asceticism. Carter (2002) makes extensive use of Douglas' group and grid theories to explain Paul's attitude towards sin.

[13] Bradley (2012), 17. [14] Meinel (2015), 13.

[15] See, e.g., Kekes (1992); Haidt et al. (1997). For a recent summary of scholarship, see Strohminger (2014). For applications in biblical studies, see Kazen (2008); Feder (2013); Levavi Feinstein (2014), 23–41.

disgust research provides information on what *may* be the target of purity rules and why, but not so much on why a particular selection of these rules is found in any particular culture.

Since the disgust perspective leaves so much to cultural variation and its details do not necessarily correlate with purity rules, it has little explanatory power in a study of a discourse deeply embedded in an existing cultural tradition. Nevertheless, it is useful for three reasons. First, it provides a general outline of which areas are susceptible to purity rituals and discourses in most cultures, confirming that food, death, sexual relations and emissions, as well as outsiders and immoral behavior are areas which should be examined. Second, it serves as a reminder that not all is tradition: while the Christian authors are working within and reacting to an existing discourse on purity and defilement, there is also a basic biological foundation of disgust from certain substances, to which it was difficult to be totally oblivious.

Third, an investigation of the historical roots of Western purity discourse may aid the contemporary study of disgust. Philosophers and psychologists are debating vigorously to what extent immoral behavior is in fact a disgust elicitor, and what are the implications of this. Religious ideas are central in contemporary definitions of disgust. For example, one central article defines disgust as "the guardian of the temple of the body," and contrasts disgust, which guards against "threats to the soul," to fear, which guards against "physical threats to the body."[16] Another argues that disgust is felt specifically towards "violations of divinity."[17] These ideas are to a great extent part of a specific (Western/Christian) cultural tradition, and thus a historical critique of their formulation in the pivotal period of early Christianity can serve to explain their presence in Western culture, and to indicate possible paths for intercultural comparison on these questions.[18]

This study focuses on the *purity discourse* created in Christian communities rather than on the *purity practices* of these communities. All that is known of purity in early Christianity is mediated through texts; and it is principally the texts (and the beliefs of authors as expressed in texts), rather than the practices themselves, which I intend to investigate. While some facts on the practices themselves can be ascertained through the texts—e.g., baptism was conducted in the first centuries and was preceded by certain prayers and rituals—their character as *purity* practices was a result of the interpretation of the people who practiced them, to which, again, we have access only through the textual lens of Christian writers. Inevitably, a historian can only analyze text or artifact, and only at second instance the practice itself. This is especially relevant for the history of Christian ritual, which has a strong polemical aspect and in which writers

[16] Haidt et al. (1997). [17] Rozin et al. (1999).

[18] For the importance of collaboration between cognitive research and historians on purity and pollution, see Feder (2016).

were continuously in dialogue with other purity traditions.[19] This focus on purity discourse will facilitate the understanding of what early Christians themselves understood purity and defilement to be, rather than how their practices can be understood through purity concepts imposed from the outside.

Considering this focus, it is essential to chart out the rather uneven field of purity discourse, at least as a starting point. The connotations of purity terms are wide, frequently general and imprecise, and not necessarily religious; therefore, many instances of their usage are not at the heart of this investigation, though they may form the basis for the very idea of purity. On the most mundane level, καθαρός could be applied to a person or an object when it was physically clean and washed, or physically unmixed or unstained with a foreign substance; μιαρός or ἀκάθαρτος when the opposite was the case. This usage of the terms, which has little to do with either religious or cultural purity, is not directly under discussion here, though it is relevant as the main image behind purity discourse. A second usage of impurity language is that used to convey emotions of disgust and contamination. As discussed above, these emotions need not be ritualized or have religious motivation or significance, and this type of usage is therefore not the focus of the discussion. However, when disgust is articulated or validated religiously or is expressed through religious rituals or laws, it comes into the ambit of this book. A third usage of purity and defilement language is to describe the general moral status of people, which may or may not have religious consequences. In these cases, the author's intention was not to imply that the person is free or not of a specific defilement, but rather to add general rhetorical edge to their praise or condemnation of a person or action. This ad hoc usage borrows the connotations of purity language but without implying a larger worldview connected to it.

To determine which of these usages is meant, it is essential to examine the context. For example, when "pure" appears without further elaboration as one adjective in a list of positive adjectives describing a person, it is reasonable to see it as more general and less significant. On the other hand, when a number of purity terms appear, and especially when the relations between these terms are specified (e.g., a specific defilement is opposed to purity, purification from defilement is called for, impurity is identified as opposed to holiness), this is a more significant text. In these cases, purity or defilement is not an unstructured, general term, but a specific part of a conceptual structure.

A number of terms bear a close relation to purity, and thus merit discussion here. The first is ἅγιος and its derivatives, meaning "holy" or "sacred."[20] This

[19] For the study of discourse as an essential approach to the history of early Christianity, see Cameron (1994), 15–24; Lieu (2004), 8–11, 28–61. For defilement as a tool in Roman rhetoric, see Lennon (2013), 167–87.

[20] Other terms for holy or sacred are ὅσιος, ἱερός and σεμνός. These are less frequent in the New Testament and early Christian writers than ἅγιος. For a discussion of the relationships between these terms, see Wartelle (1989).

term is relatively rare in earlier Greek literature, but is used hundreds of times in the LXX to render the root קדש as well as other terms relating to the divine and the sancta,[21] and then used copiously by Paul and most early Christian writers. There is an affinity between concepts of holiness and religious purity, as both are attributes of the divine and therefore necessary attributes of people who wish to approach the divine, or of places and objects linked to the divine. However, these terms are not synonymous. In general, while ἅγιος denotes what is positively set apart and consecrated to God, purity is frequently (though not always) a negative concept, referring to a lack of defilement. Seen more dynamically, purification is the removal of defilement, while sanctification or consecration is a raising of status.

Another relevant group of words is that of corruption (φθορά) and incorruption or integrity (ἀφθαρσία). φθείρω can extend to mean "to subject to decay or death," "to destroy (physically or morally)," and also "to seduce." As such the meaning of these terms appears to be rather far from defilement, and is not used to connote defilement in Jewish Greek authors. However, second- and third-century Christian writers frequently used words of this group, sometimes together with terms of defilement, to describe their revulsion from sexual sin.[22] Following post-first-century Greek usage as found in Plutarch and other writers, these words function as terms of moral disgust, and their appearance signals the emotional and rhetorical force of such sins.[23] As in the case of terms of defilement proper, this word group is at times used ad hoc or more systematically as opposed to purity and/or holiness (in the case of φθορά) or as opposed to defilement (in the case of ἀφθαρσία). These terms shall be discussed only in the latter case, when φθορά appears to expand the borders of purity discourse.

## EXAMINING DICHOTOMIES

The central dichotomy of Christian purity discourse is that of sin versus bodily defilement: this dichotomy is negotiated again and again throughout the corpus. At times, sin is strongly differentiated from bodily defilement, and interest in the latter is relegated to Jews or pagans; elsewhere, sin and bodily defilement appear to be conflated, with sin reified and made corporeal. Frequently, this dichotomy is described by scholars as reflecting an opposition of "moral purity" versus "ritual purity," with the former relating to sin and the latter to bodily

[21] See Gehman (1954). ἅγιος very rarely (twice out of hundreds) translates terms of purity (טהר: Lev 10:14; ברר: Jer 4:11) in the LXX.

[22] At times words of this group may take on meanings of defilement: see Lampe (1961), φθορά (2); Liu (2013), 122–3 concerning 1 Cor 3:16.

[23] For the term in Plutarch, see Vamvouri Ruffy (2012).

defilement with little moral significance. Thus Jonathan Klawans, in his seminal *Sin and Impurity in Ancient Judaism*, traces the development of various relationships—opposition, compartmentalization, merge—between systems of ritual purity and moral purity across the history of ancient Judaism, from the Hebrew Bible to the Rabbis and the New Testament.[24] Clearly, in order to better understand the dynamics of Christian purity discourse, the shifts and continuities of this dichotomy should be traced and analyzed, with special attention given to how the concepts of sin and defilement are shaped in the discourse.

As an external vantage point to Christian purity discourse, I will use a general heuristic consisting of "battle" and "truce," referring to the relationship between pure and impure as found in different religions and cultures, including early Christianity. These terms were not (usually) used by the authors themselves, and are rather an attempt at a synthesis. While both "battle" and "truce" perceptions of purity are found in most cultures, in some one perception is more dominant than the other; in Judaism and Greco-Roman religions truce perceptions were more dominant, while in early Christianity battle perceptions were dominant.

For truce perceptions, purity and impurity are statuses, rather than forces. Both purity and impurity are conceived as normal, a result and expression of human life and the order of the world. There is no attempt to totally eradicate impurity. Rather, purification consists in the separation of pure from impure and the careful management of the borders between things or people of different statuses, which are continuously breached and sealed again. An admixture is therefore seen as impure, as purity consists in separation. Purity is essentially a second-order mechanism: it safeguards and defines the borders of social groups, spaces, and times, thus creating and constructing these entities and the order of the religious and social cosmos. This function is usually achieved through ritual. Purity and defilement have a moral dimension in the support they give to the primary structures of society.

In battle perceptions, purity and impurity are seen as two opposing, active forces: the former is good, the latter evil. Purity and impurity are aligned with the general struggle between good and evil. Therefore, purity and impurity frequently merge with other common dichotomies: between holiness and unholiness, saint and demon, righteousness and sin, flesh and spirit, out-group and in-group. Since both purity and impurity are active forces, they may vanquish each other: a strong force of purity/holiness can drive out weak impurity and vice versa. The struggle between purity and impurity may be internalized—a person may contain both elements, and attempt to achieve purification by strengthening the pure aspects and weakening the impure. As primary mechanisms, purity and impurity have a moral aspect, but ritual is an important way of conducting and expressing the struggle between pure and impure.

[24] For alternative terminologies of Jewish purity, see chapter 2, n. 111.

## GEOGRAPHIC AND TEMPORAL RANGE, AND SUBJECTS DISCUSSED

This study discusses Christian texts written in Greek and Syriac up to the time of Origen—the middle of the third century—including those extant only in Latin or Syriac translation. I also discuss briefly some of the Coptic texts found in Nag Hammadi.[25] Geographically, I focus on the Eastern Roman Empire and Mesopotamia, i.e., the Greek- and Aramaic-speaking areas: specifically, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor. The main fatalities of this linguistic and geographic concentration are the Latin North Africans Tertullian, Cyprian, and Novatian, as well as the (originally Greek) *Apostolic Tradition*, which may have been written in Rome.[26] All of these relate to issues of purity and defilement (especially concerning sex and baptism), but will require a separate study. Other texts not discussed are the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, *Joseph and Asenath* and other apocryphal texts based on characters from the Old Testament. While some of these texts include references to purity and defilement, they are very difficult to date and to assign to a Jewish, Christian, or Jewish-Christian context, with datings ranging from the first centuries BCE to the fourth century CE. These texts, too, await further study from the purity perspective.[27] Yet another text not discussed comprehensively in this book for reasons of uncertain dating is *P. Oxy 840*, which deals with baptism and purity in a polemical context.[28]

I chose to concentrate on four subjects—food, death, baptism, and sex. These subjects appear to me to include the most significant purity discourse in early Christian texts, both explicit and implicit. Furthermore, these subjects provide quite different vantage points on Christian purity discourse, allowing for comparison and analysis. Since these were the main areas of purity and defilement discourse also in the cultures from which Christianity grew, focusing on these subjects facilitates discussions of continuity versus innovation and counter-definition. Necessarily, this concentration means that some other issues receive

[25] Aspects of purity and defilement in fourth-century Christianity have been more extensively studied than those of earlier periods, and will not be discussed here; see references above, n. 2.

[26] Though many scholars believe it is an aggregation of sources from different areas and periods between the second and fourth centuries; see Bradshaw et al. (2002), 1–19. *Apostolic Tradition* 15–21 has much material on the baptismal process as purification: see Kelly (1985), 81–93; Bradshaw et al. (2002), 82–135; Ekenberg (2010). And see also *Apostolic Tradition* 41.11 on sex and prayer. For Tertullian on purity and defilement, see especially *Idol.* 16–18; *Spect*. 8, 17; *Cor*. 12 (on idolatry); *Marc*. 2.18, 4.8–9 (on Jewish law); *Jejun*. 1–5, 14–15 (on food); *Bapt*. 4–5, 15, 18–20 (on baptism); *Ux*. 2.2; *Virg*. 7; *Pud*. 13–19 (on sex) with Radler (2009). On moral and ritual transformations in Tertullian in general, see Stroumsa (1999), 158–67. For Cyprian, see *Ep*. 64 (58).5; 70 (69); 74 (73).5; *Laps*. 10, 15–17, 22–7 (on baptism, rebaptism, and idolatry) with Burns (1993); *Eleem*. 2–3 (on inner and outer purification); *Hab. virg*. 2, 17–19 (on sex) with Hunter (2007), 120–2.

[27] See *T. Reu*. 5–6; *T. Levi* 9, 14–16; *T. Jud*. 23; *T. Ash.* 1–4; *T. Jos*. 4, 6; *T. Benj*. 5–8, with Rosen-Zvi (2006) and Marcus (2010); *Jos. Asen*. 8; 12.5; 15.

[28] Bovon (2000); Stewart-Sykes (2009).

less attention: idolatry, discussed briefly in the context of food offered to idols; illness and healing in general and leprosy in particular;[29] and purification from sin in contexts other than the Christian community: the purification/atonement afforded by Jesus in his death and purification in the eschaton. Other areas are discussed throughout the book as cutting across the four subjects, but do not receive separate chapters: for example, the defilement of "the other" (pagans, heretics, or Jews) and demonology.

## CHAPTER OUTLINES

This introduction is followed by a chapter on purity and defilement in the Greco-Roman world and in Judaism, together comprising Part I. Part II, composed of chapters 3 and 4, discusses two areas in which Christian purity discourse focused on its difference from Judaism (and to a lesser extent, from paganism): dietary observances and death defilement. Part III, composed of chapters 5 to 7, discusses three areas in which the focus of first- and second-century Christian purity discourse was on creating and explaining new rituals and social practices: baptism, eucharist and the management of sin, especially sexual, in the community. Part IV, composed of chapters 8 and 9, turns to the third century, and to two groups of texts in which purity discourse is especially significant: texts from Jewish-Christian communities and the writings of Origen. In both of these, purity discourse is multi-layered, with both battle and truce type discourses playing their part.

In chapter 2, I describe in brief how purity and defilement were practiced and discussed in the diverse cults practiced throughout the Hellenistic and Roman Empires and in the cult practiced by Jews in the Hellenistic, Roman, and Parthian empires. Several types of purity and defilement were in operation in ancient religions. The first type, corresponding to a "truce" impurity perception, was temporary and mundane, a defilement occurring when there was an obstruction to the normal order or when categories were mixed up. Typical examples are blood transgressing the boundaries of the body, or the dead intruding upon the living; defiled persons required relatively simple purifications in order to enter temples. A second type of defilement, corresponding to a "battle" impurity perception, followed exceptional actions, typically deliberate, such as murder or adultery. Here purification required both punishment by the community and ritual actions, such as sacrifice. A third type, an extension and interiorization of "battle" impurity, became more and more significant in the first centuries CE. This was the defilement of the individual by his or her evil actions and

[29] See Martin (1995) for Paul; Holman (1999) for Gregory of Nyssa, and Methodius of Olympus' *De Lepra*.

dispositions, conceptualized at times as a "defilement of the soul," and its purification through asceticism, philosophy, or repentance. This purification could be a life-long pursuit of an ideal of purity that could rarely be reached.

Though purity and defilement featured in both Greco-Roman and Jewish religions, it received an unusually central role in Judaism. Purity from temporary defilements was highly valued among significant portions of the Jewish population in the first centuries BCE and CE, and Jewish writers made much use of purity terms to describe moral virtues and sins. While purity in late Second Temple Judaism has received scholarly attention in the past decades, second- and third-century Judaism, in which purity rituals had to be interpreted anew for a religion without a sacred center, have been much less investigated in this regard. For the purposes of this study, the former is important for understanding the ground from which Christian conceptions grew or reacted against, while the latter provides a comparison for contemporary Christianity.

The following two chapters, on dietary laws and death defilement, respectively, focus on areas in which Christian discourse of the first two centuries associated bodily purity with Judaism and nominally rejected it. In these areas, the battle perception of purity held by the emerging Christian communities was fundamentally at odds with the truce perception of Jewish and Greco-Roman religions, leading to a total lack of sympathy towards the purity rules of these religions.

Chapter 3 discusses the purity and defilement of food. Starting from the Gospels and the letters of Paul, food is the *locus classicus* for debates on the correct attitude towards purity laws. Issues of food purity served as a focus for the construction of Christian identity in the first and second centuries, and it is from here that purity issues received their polemic character. While the first-century sources reject only some secondary Jewish food purity laws, by the end of the century the Levitical dietary laws themselves were under dispute, creating the basis for all subsequent opinion. Most second-century Christian writers agreed that food, in principle, cannot be impure, and that the application of purity status to food characterizes Jews or heretics. Evidence from scripture or communal custom which indicated the contrary required explanation, and these explanations indicate how writers translated the notion of impurity into concepts coherent with their worldview.

The discussion in this chapter is constructed around two types of such problematic evidence. The first was Christian observance of food abstinence, especially from food offered to idols, and their description using terms of purity and defilement by Paul. The second was the dietary laws of Leviticus, in which scripture speaks of certain foods as impure. Writers such as the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, Justin Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria put forth a variety of readings—allegorical, historical, and ascetic—to contend with the implications of the dietary laws for a theory of purity. These readings represent an attempt to reconstruct the notion of defilement on the foundation of human

free will. Although this may appear to be a radical move undermining the basis for a "real" distinction between various foods, I argue that it in fact retains a notion of impurity while using a new moral language which accords with the theological and anthropological outlook of early Christians.

Chapter 4 turns to another area in which the idea of purity was nominally rejected: purification from death defilement, commonly practiced throughout the ancient world. Here too, Christian writers spoke of death defilement in a polemic context, characterizing purification from death defilement as a Jewish preoccupation, which Christians should not practice. It is quite unclear, however, to what extent Christian death impurity practice was in fact different from that of pagans or Jews. A close reading of the texts in their historical contexts indicates that Christian purity discourse in this area is better understood as constructing Christian identity, rather than reflecting contemporary practice. And yet, as compared to the energy expended on contending with issues of food purity, death defilement received relatively few mentions in Christian writers of the first three centuries. This indicates that death defilement was not a suitable object for anti-Jewish polemic for many Christian writers. The reason for this, I argue, lies in the deep transformations which Christianity brought about in perceptions of the dead human body and in perceptions of sacred space. Due to these transformations, death defilement became a totally unviable option for Christian ritual, and polemic was not required.

The following three chapters focus on baptism and sin, areas in which the focus of Christian discourse was not on the rejection of Jewish purity practices but rather on the adoption or creation of new notions of bodily purity and defilement.

Chapter 5 discusses baptism, a ritualization of the Christian battle-perception of purity, and a marking of the community's external boundaries. Most authors who wrote about baptism in the first and second centuries characterized it as an act of purification, an understanding which is supported by the imagery of the ritual itself and by the Jewish and pagan parallels. This understanding made baptism dangerously similar to Jewish ritual, and the first section of the chapter therefore focuses on the efforts of Christian authors to differentiate between Christian baptism and Jewish rituals.

In this chapter I investigate what exactly baptism was thought to purify. Some authors speak of a purification from past sins, others from Sin as a cosmological or ontological entity; some of materiality itself, yet others of "the flesh," the "fire of lust," or even impure spirits. This identification of baptism—a physical act of washing—with purification from what would seem to be non- or semi-physical entities makes it a major site for addressing the relationship between external and internal purity, the role of conscious intention as opposed to ritual action, and the place of spiritual entities. Many Christian authors, such as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, carefully skirt this danger zone by emphasizing the conscious moral *metanoia* undertaken by the baptizand and

the spiritual enlightenment accompanying the ritual, all the while taking care to point out that other groups—pagans, Jews, or various "heretics"—believe they can be purified by the physical act alone. Other writers, however, do attempt to work out the spiritual workings of a physical ritual, indicating that it is a reflection of the duality of the human person and of the cosmos as a whole. Such theorizing can be found already in Valentinian texts such as the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, and is developed in Origen's symbolic ritual theory or in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*'s demonological theory.

In chapter 6 I turn to the internal ordering of the community through purity discourse concerning sin. I discuss the regulation of sin inside the borders of the pure community, focusing on the eucharist and on the conceptualization of repentance as purification. Though in the first two centuries the eucharist already became the sacred ritual representing the community, and was therefore guarded by purity restrictions, there was as yet no ritual system through which sinners could purify themselves and thus approach the eucharist.

Chapter 7 focuses on sexual purity discourse. I show that sexual sin became the main target for purity discourse in early Christian texts, and try to explain why. Christian imagery of sexual defilement drew from a number of traditions—Greco-Roman sexual ethics, imagery of sexual sin from the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple texts, and both Jewish and pagan purity laws, all seen through the lens of Paul's imagery of sexuality and sexual sin. These traditions themselves reflected battle perceptions of purity, and therefore Christianity adapted, rather than rejected them.

Two broad currents characterized Christian sexual ethics in the second century: one upheld marriage and the family as the basis for a holy Christian society and church, while the second rejected all sexuality, including in marriage. Writers of both currents made heavy use of defilement imagery. For the first, sexual sin was a dangerous defilement, contaminating the Christian community and severing it from God; some writers also recognized intercourse or menstruation as a temporary defilement, preventing religious activities (a remnant, or perhaps resurgence, of a truce-perception of purity). For the second, more radical current, sexuality itself was the defilement, and a Christian who wished to be a "temple of God" must not succumb to it; virginity or continence alone were pure. I focus on the way purity discourse served the rhetorical interests of each current. For the first, purity language was a way of emphasizing the difference between Christians and pagans, but also a way of constructing an alternative sexual purity model to that of the radical anti-marriage sects. For the second, purity language worked to blur the borders between sexual sin and sexuality in general; typically, pure virginity was opposed to defiled adultery, excluding a middle option of pure marriage.

Part IV moves from the second to the third century, and, I argue, from a period in which battle imagery was almost totally dominant in Christian purity discourse to a period in which it was combined with truce imagery, reflecting

the new ritual structures being constructed and the stronger integration of the Hebrew Bible into Christian culture.

Chapter 8 is dedicated to texts providing information on Jewish-Christian communities, especially the chapter 26 of the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the *Ps.-Clementines*, and sources on the Elchasites. These sources show that baptism had a purificatory role quite similar to that which it received in other communities with a focus on purification from sexual sin. Other purificatory washings were practiced as well, mostly as purification from genital emissions or from sexual relations. Demons were frequently invoked to explain the workings of impurity. As all of these ideas and practices existed also in other Christian communities, none of them individually are unique to Jewish-Christians. Nevertheless, the combination of all of them together created a purity discourse with a specific flavor, which was not simply of retaining Jewish custom but of a different conceptualization of what purity and defilement in fact mean.

In Chapter 9 I turn to Origen, probably the most important Christian writer of the third century. I argue that Origen's purity discourse was innovative on many fronts, as can be seen in his writings on sexuality, baptism, and on dietary issues. Defilement imagery concerning sexuality is especially prominent. Many of the ideas found in the earlier traditions and in the two second-century currents are synthetized here into a new (at times inconsistent) theory of sexual defilement. Although Origen did not prohibit marriage, he saw sexuality as defiled, the quintessential expression of human corporeality, closely connected with sin though not synonymous with it. I argue that Origen was the first Christian thinker who integrated the notion of temporary sexual defilement found in the Hebrew Bible with the second-century Christian notion of essential sexual defilement, creating a nuanced conception of defilement which was to have great influence in the future.

As in sexual issues, in baptism too Origen supplies a relatively systematic usage of purity discourse; baptism and sex are linked through his understanding of infant baptism as purification from an inherent defilement linked to the sexual origin of the human body. Some Jewish-Christian sources also saw a degree of overlap between baptismal purification and purification from sexual defilement. Thus in the third century there are a number of sources constructing new ritual purity systems, in which sexuality and baptism are the opposite poles. Here Christianity not only reacted to external purification perceptions, but created new systems reflecting the anthropology and cosmology of the new religion.

In the general conclusion, I discuss the consequences of the textual analyses for the overarching theme of the book—how purity and defilement are redefined in early Christianity to support the anthropology, demonology, and theology of second- and third-century communities, and to construct the identity of these communities. I compare the different areas of purity discourse, and attempt to trace the historical development of purity concepts and ideas through the first three centuries of Christianity.

# 2

# Purity and Defilement in the Greco-Roman East and in Judaism

Purity rituals were common in Eastern Mediterranean cults of the first three centuries CE; purity discourse was ubiquitous in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin texts of the period, appearing in a range of contexts, both religious and non-religious. My discussion is an attempt to appreciate the diversity of meanings purity and defilement could take in ancient practice and discourse, and thereby the broad range purity language could evoke for writers, readers, and listeners in antiquity. I am especially interested in appreciating the different ways in which the relationship between impurity and immoral actions was approached.[1] Considering purity discourses and practices in the Mediterranean will help understand the continuities and the innovations of Christian purity discourse: when writers are appealing, deliberately or not, to common ideas of their religious and cultural milieu, and when they are coining new ideas and discourses.

The focus is therefore on texts contemporary with the development of Christian purity discourse, i.e., texts from the Hellenistic and Roman East between the second century BCE and the third CE.[2] These texts come from two circles. First, the diverse cultures of the Roman East, expressed mostly in Greek, from Alexandria to the Black Sea, from Mesopotamia to Rome. The texts they produced—temple regulations, medical treatises, literary works, philosophical texts—are the prime sources for what most converts to Christianity in the second and third centuries may have had in mind when they enacted or spoke purity discourse. Second, the Jewish communities, especially in Palestine and Syria, which were the original context for the Jesus movement and ensuing Jewish-

[1] This question is one of the central issues discussed by Parker (1983), see especially 96–103, 281–307, 323–7. Chaniotis (1997) is an important study on this issue, with a shortened version appearing in English in Chaniotis (2012).

[2] This chapter is intended to complement the classic discussion of Parker (1983), who focuses on fourth- to fifth-century BCE Greece, and Lennon (2013), who focuses on Latin authors from Rome. I thank Jack Lennon for allowing me to read the manuscript before publication. Neither necessarily provides the relevant chronological or geographical context for Christian communities of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Christian communities. Their writings—the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus and Philo, biblical apocrypha and early rabbinic texts—fulfill two functions in this study. On the one hand, they provide the context for the development of the early Christian communities, i.e., the ideas and practices which community members brought with them and were reacting to, and, on the other hand, they provide a comparative alternative for the development of purity discourse in the second- and third-century Christian communities, especially when the discourses are both based on the Hebrew Bible. Of course, the Jewish purity discourses were themselves embedded in and reacting to contemporary discourses—Greco-Roman, Christian, and perhaps Zoroastrian and local Palestinian and Syrian cults as well.

## THE GRECO-ROMAN EAST

Already in fifth-century BCE Greece a wide range of meanings was assigned to terms of purity and defilement, a range which continued to serve, with some variations of emphasis, into Roman-era Greek. The two most common terms for "pure" are *καθαρός* (and the associated *καθαρμός*, purification; *καθαίρω*, to purify) and *ἁγνός* (and the associated *ἁγνεία*, purity; *ἁγνίζω*, to purify). The semantic fields of these terms are not identical, though with significant overlap and shading: *καθαρός* refers to physical cleanliness from dirt and stains, as well as the purity required to enter temples and purity from sins and crimes. *ἁγνός* is used only for metaphysical, not physical purity: the purity required to enter temples, purity from sins and crimes, and general integrity of character (the latter especially in epigraphy). *ἁγνός* may shade into "holy" or "sacred," and *ἁγνίζω* into "consecrate," especially in Classical Greek, indicating the originally religious connotation of this term; in Jewish and Christian Greek, however, there are few clear attestations for this meaning, which is typically reserved for *ἅγιος*.[3] Both *καθαρός* and *ἁγνός* may be used for purity relating to the sexual sphere, though the latter is more common. Indeed, *ἁγνεία* is commonly translated as "chastity," though this obscures the other purity connotations of the term. Thus although the Greek language originally had different terms for purity of a more or less physical character (*καθαρός* vs. *ἁγνός*), historically these terms expanded their respective semantic fields and gained new meanings, so that both *καθαρός* and *ἁγνός* could be used of

[3] Liddell and Scott (1996); Arndt (2000); Lampe (1961), *s.v.* For discussion of the terms' respective fields in Greek literature, see Parker (1983), 1–17; Rudhardt (1992), 163–75; Graf (2007), 104–5; Vahrenhorst (2008), 81–6; Robertson (2013). In this study I normally translate both as "pure," since there is no suitable English term which captures the distinction. *ἄγος*/*ἐναγής*, denoting pollution or guilt resulting from a crime in earlier Greek literature, is rare in early Christian texts; see Lampe (1961), *s.v.*

metaphysical purity of various types and degrees. Defilement, both physical and metaphysical, is connoted most often by μιαρός and the verb μιαίνω, or μολυσμός and the verb μολύνω. It is very common, however, to find impurity connoted by negation: ἀκάθαρτος, ἄναγνος. An associated term with more emotional force is βδελυρός, "disgusting," or "abominable."

I shall first discuss purity and pollution as they relate to sacred space and religious rituals, and then turn to the application of these terms in Greco-Roman literature, rhetoric and philosophy.

## Marking the sacred, controlling disgust

Practices and language of pollution and purification feature in Greco-Roman religious rituals both in the preparations for the main ritual, typically a sacrifice performed in sacred space, and in the main ritual itself. The types of pollution and purifications in each of these stages were quite different. Worshipers typically had more agency in the preparatory purifications, while those of the main stage were performed by priests or gods; in parallel, the main stage was seen as more powerful and significant than the preparatory one.

The best examples for preparatory purification come from cultic regulations. In Greece and Asia Minor, cultic regulations were commonly posted at the entrance to temples, listing conditions for entry.[4] As the majority of extant inscriptions come from the second century BCE to the second century CE, they are highly relevant as context for the development of Christian discourse. Typically, besides required pure attire (white clothes, little to no jewelry) and prohibited objects (arms, keys, objects made of iron or leather), they list various conditions deemed polluting, and how these may be purified. No two inscriptions are identical, but here I shall use a relatively straightforward example, found in Lindos, and dated to the second century CE:

> For those who wish to enter the temple auspiciously.
> First and most important is to be sound and pure in hands and thought, and not to have knowledge of dreadful [things].
> And the external things:
> After [eating] lentils, three days
> After [eating] goatmeat, three days
> After [eating] cheese, one day
> After abortions, 40 days
> After bereavement in the household, 40 days

[4] On these "sacred laws" see Chaniotis (1997); Lupu (2004), 209–10; Petrovic and Petrovic (2006); Graf (2007); Vahrenhorst (2008), 73–114; Thomas (2010). For a recent comprehensive analysis, see Robertson (2013), who in p. 202 n.19 provides a useful list of the thirty-three relevant inscriptions. For a more comprehensive list see Petrovic and Petrovic (forthcoming); to this list add Decourt and Tziafalias (2015).

After lawful sexual relations, on the same day
Following a sprinkling round [with water] and anointing with olive oil
After a virgin . . . [5]

In line with other cultic regulations after the second century BCE, the text opens with a paragraph on the prime importance of purity of mind (i.e., from intention or knowledge of evildoing) and of hands (from actual crimes), categorically differentiated from the "external" conditions listed afterwards.[6] As Jack Goody has commented, lists reduce quality to quantity, to produce an authoritative, homogenous text:[7] for the reader, the listed conditions become essentially similar, differing only in the degree of purification required. Thus such regulations created two basic classes of conditions, one relating to internal and intentional states, the other to external and non-intentional ones. In the latter case ritual management is clearly provided, while in the former case no purification technique is given: as another third-century CE regulation declares, "from violation of the laws one is never pure."[8] Sacrifice and approaching the divine are marked as practices which require both ritual and non-ritual preparations, both internal and external integrity. Interior purity, according to these regulations, cannot be ritualized through washing (or even penance or change of heart) but it *can* be ritualized by its implicit proclamation in entering the sanctuary and participating in its rituals.

The rhetorics of the inscription, however, are only one side of the matter. The "external" conditions are not, in fact, totally different from "purity of mind." Purity regulations (whether or not they were honored or enforced, by their very display) mark certain spaces, times, and persons as sacred and dedicated to the gods, creating geographical, temporal, and social hierarchies.[9] The placement of the inscriptions on the borders of the sacred space, and the water basins (*perirrhanteria*) set up in the vicinity for washing hands before entrance

[5] *LSCG* 139 (*IG* XII.1 789): *ἀφ' ὧν χρ[ὴ] πα[ρ]ῖν[α]ι αἰσίως <ει>ς τὸ ἱε[ρ]όν· πρῶτον μὲν καὶ τὸ μέγιστον· χεῖρας καὶ <χ>νώμην καθαροὺς καὶ ὑγιε[ῖς] ὑπάρχοντας καὶ μηδὲν αὑτοῖς δεινὸν συνειδότας. καὶ τὰ ἐκτός· ἀπὸ φακῆς ἡμερῶν γ'· ἀπὸ αἰγείου ἡμ^ε^(ρῶν) γ'· ἀπὸ τυροῦ ἡμ^ε^(ρας) α'· ἀπὸ φθορείω[ν] ἡμ^ε^(ρῶν) μ'· ἀπὸ κήδους [οἰκ]είου ἡμ[ε(ρῶν)] μ'· ἀπὸ συνουσίας νομ[ί]μου αὐθημερὸν περιραναμένους καὶ πρότερον χρεισαμένους ἐλαίῳ· ἀπὸ παρθενείας . . .*

[6] *LSCG* 124 (Lesbos, second century BCE): "but a murderer cannot enter, nor a traitor"; Errington (1993), 15 (Euromos, Caria, second century BCE): entry requirement of "pure heart," as opposed to "doing injustice" and "impurity of mind"; *IC* 1 23.3.6–11 (Crete, second century BCE): "all the pious and those of good speech come as pure into the temple"; *LSS* 108 (Rhodes, first century CE): "one must be pure from intercourse, from beans and from heart, not by bathing but by a pure mind"; see similarly *LSS* 82 (Mytilene, Imperial period); *LSS* 91 (Lindos, third century CE); *LSCG* 55 (Athens, second century CE); inscription in Asclepius' temple at Epidaurus, cited by Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 5.1.13.3, 4.22.142.1 and Porphyry *Abst.* 2.19.5: "Purity is to think holy thoughts (*ἁγνεία δ' ἐστὶ φρονεῖν ὅσια*)." Cf. Cicero, *Leg.* 2.24. See Chaniotis (1997) and Dickie (2001) for Greek and Latin literary sources promoting purity of mind as a condition for cult.

[7] Goody (1977), 84–8; cf. Gordon (2000).

[8] *LSS* 91.19: *ἀπὸ τῶν παρανόμων οὐδέποτε καθαρός.*

[9] Cole (2004), Graf (2007).

strengthen this border-marking function.[10] A complementary perspective is that of the worshiper's experience: the purity requirements created preparatory periods and rituals before festivals or temple visits, during which a person would be mindful of the ensuing visit.[11]

The relative difficulty of purification in this law is quite typical: Death in the household—including abortion—is most severe, requiring a lengthy wait of ten to forty days.[12] Not found here, but commonly found in other regulations, are giving birth or contact with a parturient, requiring between seven and forty days.[13] Sexual intercourse and certain foods (goat- and pig-meat, lentils, beans, cheese, and garlic) require no more than one to three days' waiting, or simply washing.[14] Menstruation is mentioned in only a few laws as requiring seven to nine days' wait.[15] This creates two categories: death and birth as major pollutants, and sex and food as minor ones. There is a rough correlation between the severity of the pollution and its rarity: death and birth in the household are obviously much rarer than normal sexual relations or the eating of lentils (a staple in antiquity). Another difference might be that the latter are conscious actions, which can be abstained from at will, while the former cannot be controlled. But whatever the reason, it is important simply that there is a difference: pollution serves as a quantifiable index for the compatibility of certain conditions with the divine. These conditions, however, were not only a matter of entering sacred space. Their roots lay in domestic ritual and in general cultural conceptions of what is proper, natural, and right as opposed to what is disgusting and reprehensible. I will survey the place of the pollutions of death, birth, sex, and food in Greco-Roman culture in order to highlight the variability and complexity of their meanings.

The link between pollution and disgust is perhaps clearest in the case of death. In many cultures, the sense of disgust from corpses, their decay and odor, and the attempt to distance and cleanse oneself of their contagion, is structured and ritualized through death pollution and purification.[16] From a social perspective, death is a liminal event, requiring various ritual management techniques of an abnormal situation in the lives of individuals and families. In the

[10] See Cole (2004), 42–7; Ginouvès (1962), 327–428. *Perirrhanteria*: *Sacred Disease* 1.13; Lucian, *Sacr*. 13.

[11] Gordon (2015).

[12] Abortions: *LSCG* 55, 124, 139 171; *LSS* 54, 91, 119; *LSAM* 84; Lupu (2004), 7. Death in the household or contact with a corpse: *LSS* 91, 119; *LSAM* 18, 29, 84; *LSCG* 55, 124, 139.

[13] Birth and parturients: *LSS* 54, 91, 115; *LSCG* 124; Lupu (2004), 7; *LSAM* 12.

[14] Intercourse: *LSCG* 55, 95, 124, 139, 171; *LSAM* 14, 18, 29, 51; *LSS* 54, 91, 115, 119; Lupu (2004), 7; *I. Perg.* III 161, all with Parker (1983), 84–8; food laws: *LSS* 54, with Parker (1983), 357–65; Lupu (2004), 211; Kleijwegt (1994).

[15] *LSS* 54, 119; *LSCG* 55; Lupu (2004), 7. For the pollution of menstruation in Rome, see Lennon (2010).

[16] Kazen (2008); Feder (2013); Uro (2013).

case of death, in Classical Greece as well as Imperial Rome, these included meals at the house and the tomb and purification of the house.[17]

The pollution of death does not simply mean that those touched by it were distanced from normal social life or from the sacred. After all, ritual contact with the dead in both Greece and Rome was a religious duty: ancestors were venerated and offerings were presented at their tombs, and in Roman law, the tomb was a protected *locus religiosus*. Rather, death defilement marked tomb-rituals as marginal and secondary to the primary rituals performed in the social (and usually, the geographical) center of the community.[18] This marginality had its own powers, as manifested in rituals such as necromancy.

Death did not affect all mortals equally: status and conditions of death mattered. The tombs of those who died an honorable death on the battlefield, not to speak of semi-divine heroes or emperors, did not pollute in the same way as a common tomb; suicides were even more polluting. In the Hellenistic and Roman cities of Asia Minor and Greece, most people were buried in cemeteries on the outskirts, but tombs of heroes, founders, and benefactors were purposefully situated inside cities, signaling a limited—or ambivalent—sense of pollution from them.[19] Death defilement was therefore a function not of death as a static situation, but of the nature and intensity of the transition between life and death. In other words, though death defilement was non-intentional and had nothing to do with wrongdoing, the moral actions and social status of the dead played a role in its determination.

The pollution of birth was at times equated to that of death: both are prohibited on Delos, Apollo's sacred island, both are avoided by the superstitious according to a Hellenistic writer, and the number of days' waiting in the cultic regulations is similar.[20] Censorinus, a third-century CE Roman writer, also says Greeks wait forty days after birth before entering temples.[21] Relatively little is known about domestic rituals following birth, but some sources speak of elements of purification of the child by water (washing hands) and fire (circling the hearth). In Roman literature, the mother and child are generally described as vulnerable to pollution rather than polluting, as in Greek religion.[22] Birth is of course a shake-up to the family as well as a penetration of the body's borders and a dangerous situation, but its gender specificity is probably relevant as well.

[17] For defilement of birth and death in the eastern Roman Empire see Plut. *Lyk*. 27; Lucian, *De Syria Dea* 52; Eunapius of Sardis, *Vitae Sophistarum* 459; *Corpus Juris Civilis C.* 3.44.12; Julian, *Ep*. 136b; Porphyry, *Abst*. 2.50, 4.20. For death defilement in Greece: Parker (1983), 32–48; Garland (1985), 38–47, 104–20; in Rome: Scheid (1984); Lindsay (2000); Lennon (2013), 136–66 with further bibliography.

[18] Scheid (1984).

[19] On this phenomenon, see Cormack (2004), 154, and the many articles in Henry (2013).

[20] Chrysippus, *SVP* III 753 (= Plut. *Mor*. 1044F); Thuc. 3.104.1–2; Theophrastus, *Charac*. 16; Paus. 2.27.6; Dillon, M. (2003), 252–4.

[21] *De die natali* 11.7.

[22] Lennon (2013), 58–62; for birth defilement in Roman Egypt, see Montserrat (1996), 30–34.

After death and birth, sexual relations are the next defilement most frequently listed. The cultic regulations show that a waiting period was required even after "lawful" sex before entering a temple, for both men and women,[23] and many texts speak of sex in a shrine as a major crime.[24] Though mostly sexual creatures themselves, the gods very rarely accepted purely mortal sexual activity in their midst. As in the case of death defilement, abstinence before contact with the sacred is only the most extreme manifestation of a general cultural conception of the dirtiness of sex. Thus already Hesiod speaks of not standing naked and spattered with sperm before the hearth: here it is the spilling of semen which is itself polluting.[25] However, other texts appear to point to the contact with another body, and the resulting loss of bodily integrity, as the polluting aspect. This is especially true of the penetrated partner, whether male or female; thus "defilement" or "corruption" becomes a synonym for "sexual penetration," especially in the case of virgins.[26] Gender is a third dimension: women's bodies are depicted in myth and in medicine as leaky, liquid, and dangerous to men; sexual relations with them was a risk, and pollution of men after sex may have expressed this.[27]

The degree of purity from sexual relations required for cultic activity was highly variable. Of the cultic regulations mentioning sex as defiling, most required only washing.[28] Temporary sexual abstinence was frequently required of certain cult officials: virgin priests and especially priestesses appear in Pausanias' descriptions of second-century CE Greece and in the epigraphical record.[29] Young maidens were frequently assigned to cultic jobs with a link to purity, such as washing the goddess' statue and garments (*plyntria*) or bearing water (*hydrophoros*). Another famous role for sexually abstinent priestesses was as receivers of divine oracles from Apollo at Delphi.[30] But although three major Greek goddesses (Athena, Artemis, and Hestia) were virgins, and/or, perhaps, asexual, virginity for life was almost unknown in Greek priesthoods.[31] Certain

[23] Most of the regulations speak of purity "from women," but some read "from sex," and others refer to sexual purity of both men and women: *LSCG* 151a.41–2 (fourth century BCE); *LSS* 119.7–9 (first century BCE); *LSAM* 12.4–9 (second to first century BCE); *LSAM* 18 (second century BCE).

[24] Achilles Tatius 5.21.4; Pausanias 7.19.1–3; Petzl (1994), 5 (= *SEG* 38.1237, 235/6 CE); Petzl (1994), 110 (= *SEG* 6.251, third century CE).

[25] *Works and Days* 734. However, Parker (1983), 76 n.9 brings only one more text as evidence that ejaculation is itself defiling (Ar. *Ran*. 753).

[26] Aeschines 1.12; Artem. *Oneirocritica* 5.95; Porphyry, *Abst*. 4.20.6.

[27] Carson (1999). Porphyry, *Abst.* 4.20.3 explains the pollution created by sex on all three fronts, as well as the mixing of the soul with the body and its ensuing feminization.

[28] Of the eighteen relevant regulations, listed above, n. 14, eleven require only washing, six two to three days' waiting, and one regulation from the *Pergamene Asclepia*, ten days.

[29] Paus. 2.10.4, 2.33.2, 3.18.4, 7.19.1–3, 7.26.5, 10.34.8. Artemis at Ephesus: Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 1.22.2; Paus. 8.1.13; *Apollonius of Tyre* 27.21–23. Parker (1983), 92–4, argues that when virgins were required, this was more a matter of age and status than of purity. Cf. Goff (2004), 146–52; Dillon (2003), 77–8.

[30] *SIG3*, 823a; Plut. *Def. orac*. 435d, 438c; Diod. Sic. 16.26.6.

[31] For a counter-example, Paus. 9.27.6.

festivals and cults, however, signaled their uniqueness, exoticism, or their link to fertility by requiring from their participants longer periods of abstinence and other markers of asexuality (on which more below): this trend apparently intensified in the Imperial period.[32] Further west, the link between sexual abstinence and purity was expressed by the Roman Vestal Virgins; here as well, virginity was exceptional and specific to these unique women, who safeguarded the purity of the city and were an example for "women to perceive that the feminine nature is capable of complete purity (*castitas*)."[33]

The degree of defilement of menstruation in Greco-Roman culture remains unclear. Though menstruation is a major pollutant in many cultures, the evidence in Greek and Roman texts before the third century CE is sparse.[34] Menstrual blood is considered a powerful substance with magical or medicinal effects both negative and positive,[35] but there is no Latin text which clearly speaks of it as preventing contact with the sacred.[36] Medical texts commonly speak of menstruation as a purification of the female body.[37] A few Imperial-period Greek cultic regulations include a ban on menstruating women entering the temple: all of these are of gods of Eastern origin.[38] This may indicate that menstruation was a pollutant in the local cultures of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt (as in the Hebrew Bible and other Ancient Near Eastern texts), even if the Greek sources are less concerned about it.[39]

Impurity of food may also have been a matter for an East–West divide. Though the cultic regulations list foods which require a few days' wait before entering temples, Greeks and Romans in general did not have a notion of categorical abstinence from certain foods or animals.[40] For many Greek and Roman writers, this omnivorousness was a sign of distinction from other peoples, such as Jews.[41] Of course, certain animals (and vegetables) were seen as more edible than others, and some were more suited for sacrifice than others. Some philosophical groups distinguished themselves by abstaining from certain animals, or from meat as a whole; more on this below. In the East, however,

[32] Alvar and Gordon (2008), 143–204.

[33] Cic. *Leg.* 2.29; Beard (1995); Parker (2004).

[34] Parker (1983), 101–3; Cole (2004) argues the evidence is stronger. See a possible fragment of Plutarch, fr. 97 Sandbach, which claims that "there are certain effluences and secretions from women's bodies which defile men when they are filled with them," discussion in Hunter (2007), 172–3; Porphyry, *Abst.* 2.50; Achilles Tatius 4.7.7.

[35] Arist. *Gen. An.* 727b.12–23; *de somn.* 459b.23–460a.23; Columella, *Rust.* 11.38, 50; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 7.63–4, 28.70–82.

[36] Lennon (2010). [37] See von Staden (2007).

[38] See above, n. 15: The temples are of Isis and Serapis, Men Tyrannos, "the Syrian Gods," and a Hellenistic cult in Egypt. *LSS* 91 (third century CE, Athena Lindia, Rhodes) shows signs of Egyptian influence, see Petrovic and Petrovic (2014); *LSCG* 99 is a cult regulation which may mention menstruation, but its precise provenance is unknown.

[39] See [Syrian Christian, third–fourth century] *Ps.-Clementine Hom.* 11.30, which claims that purification from menstruation and intercourse is practiced by pagans.

[40] Parker (1983), 357; Lennon (2013), 58–60. [41] See Borgeaud (2013).

the situation was clearly different. Lucian says that the devotees of the Syrian goddess believed swine impure.[42] In a second-century CE Greek text from Egypt, priests were required to swear that they will not eat, drink, or even touch unlawful foods.[43]

The temple regulations provide a highly significant corpus of evidence for the meaning of purity in the eastern Roman Empire as a preparatory element for religious rituals. They delineate the main sources of pollution and also comment on the relationship between these sources, at least as regards temple access. Enough of them are extant to indicate the broad common ground of Greco-Roman purity discourse, as well as the significant diversity in emphasis that existed between different sites, divinities, and periods. Out of a multiple and varying set of pollutions, each of different origins and significance, the temple regulations create an ordered and overarching category of purity, relevant especially for the creation of sacred space. This category, in turn, serves to support dichotomies of mind/heart vs. body as the main sources for pollution. The delineation of hierarchies, both qualitative and quantitative, between different pollutions and purifications systematizes the category of purity, providing a framework for control and management (both mental and physical) of the worshipers by the temple personnel. However, the centrality of these regulations in the discourse should not be exaggerated: they were only one type of text, one group of authors. Other genres and authors were no less influential, and to them I now turn.

## Reconciliation, expiation, and morality

The cultic regulations describe preparatory purification procedures from day-to-day pollutions to mark special places and times. But these procedures were not deemed sufficient to solve some unusual problem such as a plague or famine, to expiate for a crime or a ritual negligence, or to protect from evil forces. Here the pollution does not affect only sacred space but the community as a whole.[44] In these cases, elaborate rituals were required, in which purification was the main function.

In the case of crimes, these rituals acted in parallel to the legal process.[45] The contamination of the murderer's hands by the blood of the murdered person, drawing and representing the anger of the gods and avenging demons or ghosts, is a common trope in Greek and Roman tragedy.[46] The blood must be washed

[42] *De Syria Dea* 54.
[43] *P. Wash. U. Inv*. 138. For text and commentary, see Merkelbach (1968).
[44] Paus. 7.25.7.
[45] Parker (1983), 104–30; Arnaoutoglou (1993); Lennon (2012), 53–4; Harris (2015).
[46] Soph. *Oed. tyr.* 95–101; Dem. 21.43–46, 23.72, 37.59. For later attestations, Seneca, *Herc*. 919; Verg. *Aen*. 2.717–20; Apul. *Metam*. 8.8; Plut. *Sera*. 555c; Paus. 7.9.7. For Roman literature, Dee (2013).

off, the demons appeased, in order that the defilement be purified, requiring special rituals. These ideas, however, appear mostly in classical Greek tragedy and law, or in later texts mirroring them, while in Roman law the pollution of the murderer is hardly developed.[47] This apparent change may have been a result of the success of the Roman legal system in responding to violence, making pollution and purification less necessary.

Concerning purification of crimes, Latin texts speak of expiation of ritual negligence or of the anger of the gods expressed in prodigies by Romans,[48] but there is less evidence for the practice of purification rituals for specific crimes and negligences (as opposed to general regular purifications of the community) in the Hellenistic and Roman East. Cult regulations rarely describe crimes as polluting: a sole regulation of the second century BCE prohibits the entrance of traitors and perhaps murderers.[49] The confession stele of second- and third-century CE Asia Minor evidence a system of ritual expiation of divine anger, but the language of pollution is only used twice, to describe perjury.[50] Other regulations prohibit those who offend against them from sacrificing,[51] but it is not clear if they are considered polluted or if this is simply disciplinary action.

While in both Greece and Rome the prostitute, adulteress, or incestuous person is described in the sources as polluted, dirty, or even revolting,[52] their impurity is not described as contagious or dangerous, and no rituals for their purification are detailed.[53] Furthermore, the severity of defilement in these cases was much more status-relative, as it is only created by sexual immorality on the part of honorable citizens. Although this defilement is not reified as a physical or demonic force, it was linked to the body of the sexually immoral person and seen as "unnatural," at least in the more severe cases (e.g., incest).

The intense concern of Greek and Roman writers in the Early Empire with the supposed loosening of sexual morality is well documented. *Σωφροσύνη*, *ἐγκράτεια* (self-control or moderation, by this period frequently in the sexual sphere), *pudicitia*, *castitas* (chastity), and *incontinentia* (lack of self-control) became keywords in the discourse of philosophers and moralists, as well as the object of a legal reform led by Augustus.[54] Political propaganda focused on chastity or lack thereof of the person in question, and novels highlighted—and

[47] For a counter-example of purification of a murderer, see Phil. *Life of Apollonius* 6.5; but this is not a normal legal procedure.

[48] Scheid (1999); MacBain (1982).

[49] *LSCG* 124.10; Apoll. *Ep*. 65.

[50] Petzl (1994), no 120.2–3; 110.7.

[51] *LSAM* 16.25–7 (third century BCE, Mysia); *LSS* 33.8–11 (third century BCE, Patras); *LSCG* 55.8–9 (second century CE, Attica); *LSS* 91.23–6 (second century CE, Lindos); *LSAM* 20 (second century BCE, Lydia), unusual in many respects, does describe offenders as polluted.

[52] Dem. 59.85–86; For Rome, see Lennon (2013), 90–135.

[53] Parker (1983), 96.

[54] For *σωφροσύνη* see North (1966); for *ἐγκράτεια*, see Foucault (1988a), 63–77; Bobonich and Destrée (2007). For the Latin terms, see Langlands (2006), esp. 29–33.

questioned—the chastity of their heroes and heroines.[55] On the social level, the main thrust of this movement was to uphold monogamous marriage, in which the wife is subordinated to the husband, as the basis of an ordered and pious society and state. On the individual level, the Greco-Roman elite male was called upon by writers such as Plutarch, Seneca, Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus to curtail his sexual appetites to a minimum, and his wife likewise; the sole aim of intercourse should be reproduction.[56] Some went so far as to suggest total renunciation of sex for the true philosopher, though this was not the dominant view.

These developments naturally led to a greater emphasis on the defilement of people seen as sexually immoral, especially adulterers.[57] It was accompanied by the fascination of many texts with the dissonance between women's moral and physical sexual purity—i.e., with stories about women whose chastity is forcibly violated but who remain morally pure.[58] By the time of Heliodorus, the author of the novel *Aethiopica* (third or fourth century), the quest for sexual abstinence before marriage for both the hero and the heroine is described as "purity" (καθαρότης), and is a central driving force of the narrative, to a much greater extent than in previous novels.[59] These developments of the Hellenistic and Imperial period in which sexual purity is focused on the self may be contrasted to Classical Greece, where "it is less in order to be a certain kind of person that chastity is required than in order to enter certain places, touch certain objects, view certain sights."[60]

## Initiation, mysteries, and communal cults

The regulations' call for pure hands and minds when entering the sanctuary may be seen as a concession of a traditional genre—the cult regulation—to the pervasive idea, found in many spheres of Greco-Roman culture, that interior purity is relevant as a preparation for cult. This idea was expressed in communal and mystery cults, philosophy, law, and medicine. The call for interior purity was ritually elaborated especially in the communal and mystery cults, which became more widespread and diversified in the Hellenistic period.

Many of the widespread or well-known cults in the Greco-Roman world were not civic but rather communal, based on individual initiation: the Eleusinian, Samothracian, and Bacchic mysteries, practiced already in the fifth

[55] Propaganda: Langlands (2006), 281–318; Noreña (2007); Knust (2006), 15–50. Novels: Goldhill (1995).

[56] Veyne (1978); Foucault (1988a), 147–85; Gaca (2003), 59–117.

[57] See Lennon (2010); Langlands (2006), 45–77, 271–2.

[58] Langlands (2006), 78–116, 254–64, esp. 93–4, 114, 264.

[59] Whitmarsh (2011), 111–12, 151–4; see, e.g., *Aeth.* 1.8.3, 1.25.4, 6.9.4, 8.9.12, 10.7.7, 10.8.2, 10.9.1, 10.22.3.

[60] Parker (1983), 92.

century BCE and still popular in the Roman Empire; the cults of Isis, Serapis, and Cybele, which spread in the Hellenistic period; and the cult of Mithras, which spread in the Imperial period.[61] Some local or household-based cults also practiced initiation, modeling themselves on the more famous cults.[62] Initiation entailed a decision to belong to the circle of worshipers of a certain god, put into practice through an elaborate ritual in which the initiate encountered certain secrets of the cult. The focus on individual choice and fate in these cults led to an emphasis on individual moral behavior.

Purification featured in both the preparatory and the main rituals of initiation. First, the initiatory process as a whole was conceived as a purification and transformation of the person, providing the initiate with a special connection with the god/goddess and a better afterlife. The initiates would want to distinguish themselves from other people, and for this end they would claim ritual and moral purity and membership in a "pure" group: "[the initiate] converses with pure and holy men, he surveys the uninitiated, unpurified mob here on earth."[63] The most striking indication for this conception is found in texts inscribed on gold tablets and placed in graves of the fourth to third centuries BCE. The tablets identify the deceased as Bacchic initiates, who claim they are coming "pure from the pure" (ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρά),[64] and that they will attain a better place in the afterlife in "the seats of the pure" (ἕδρας ἐς εὐαγέιων). Euripides describes initiation as the start of a "pure life,"[65] which included abstinence from meat, wearing white clothes, and staying away from the dead.

There is more evidence for the purificatory dimension of the preliminary or preparatory stages of the mystery cults: Clement of Alexandria, for example, tells us that "the Mysteria of the Greeks begin with purification (τὰ καθάρσια), just as those of the Barbarians also begin with bathing."[66] As in other cults of the period, these preparations included washing (once or several times),

[61] For discussions of purity in the mysteries, see Parker (1983), 281–91; Burkert (1987), 89–114; Chaniotis (1997), 149–50; Hoessly (2001); Bremmer (2014), 76. For Dionysius, see Graf and Johnston (2007), esp. 121–31. For the "oriental" cults, see Alvar and Gordon (2008), esp. 143–204; the evidence on Isis is much more comprehensive than for the others, due mostly to Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, for which see Griffiths (1975), 286–308. For the relationship with Christianity, see Nock (1933); Alvar and Gordon (2008), 383–421; Graf (2010); de Jáuregui (2010), 349–51.

[62] Cult at Larissa (Decourt and Tziafalias [2015], second century BCE); private cult at Philadelphia, (*LSAM* 20, first century BCE); Mysteries of Andanaia (Gawlinski [2012], 92 BCE, Paus. 4.33.5); cult of Alexander of Abonouteichos, second century CE (Lucian, *Alexander*); Hekate on Aegina (Paus. 2.30.2, Dio Chrys. *Or*. 4.90).

[63] Plutarch, fr. 178 Sandbach: σύνεστιν ὁσίοις καὶ καθαροῖς ἀνδράσι, τὸν ἀμύητον ἐνταῦθα τῶν ζώντων καὶ ἀκάθαρτον ἐφορῶν ὄχλον ἐν βορβόρῳ. Cf. *Moralia* 1105b. And see Plato, *Phaed*. 69b (those who participated in the initiations and purifications will dwell with the gods); *Resp*. 364e (mysteries purify from sin), *Phdr*. 244e (purify from madness); Ar. *Ran*. 355 (the initiates have purified their minds).

[64] Graf and Johnston (2007), 12–15; discussion on p. 122.

[65] Euripides, *Cretans* fr. 472 (= Porph. *De Abst*. 4.56); *Bacchae*, 72–7.

[66] *Strom*. 5.70.7; see Clinton (2003).

abstinence from sex and certain foods for several days, distancing from birth and death, and sacrifices of various types.[67] Some unusual preparations are also attested, such as smearing with mud or bran,[68] fumigation, flogging, and ecstatic dancing. Furthermore, participation in the Eleusinian and Dionysian initiations was restricted to certain people: Classical sources mention the requirement to be pure of hands and speak Greek,[69] and Hellenistic and later sources of the requirements of purity of heart, mind, and speech, and to have "lived a good and righteous life."[70]

In the cult of Isis—very popular in the Roman East—there was a strong emphasis on internal and external purity, both as a preparation and as a result of initiation. In the *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius describes three preparatory lustrations which his hero Lucius undergoes as part of his initiation. Sexual abstinence was required before initiation and festivals for a lengthier period than was usual in Greek and Roman cults. The initiation of Apuleius' Lucius, for one, clearly expressed a change of heart and a decision to renounce his enslavement to pleasure.[71] Isis was praised as a goddess of justice and of marital chastity, and it is reasonable that her devotees would be expected to practice these virtues.[72]

On the ethical aspects of the Cybele and Mithras cults much less is known, but these gods were apparently seen as supporting marital chastity.[73] Porphyry mentions that in one of the grades of initiation, honey was used to purify the hands and "the tongue from all guilt (*καθαίρουσι…ἀπὸ παντὸς ἁμαρτωλοῦ*)," and that the initiates would be exhorted to "keep pure (*καθαρτικοῦ*) from everything distressing, harmful, and loathsome."[74] Jaime Alvar concludes that these cults would have promoted the moral qualities which were "in keeping with the dominant official ethics of the wider society" at this period,[75] i.e., marital chastity, obedience, self-discipline, and personal integrity. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the main meaning of the initiation ritual was an expression of loyalty and obedience to the god; ethical changes the person may undergo are the results, not the causes, of this devotion.

The emphasis on purity in the communal cults of the Roman Empire had several dimensions. First, purificatory preparations, both from the traditional pollutions and from evil actions and thoughts, were central. As opposed to other cults, there are not only calls for abstinence but also positive actions of purification of the person as a whole, going beyond washing; preparatory bodily

[67] *Rule of the Mysteries of Andania*, 12.
[68] Demosthenes, *18*.259–60.
[69] Isocr. 4.157; and see Ar. *Ran*. 354–71.
[70] Origen, *Cels*. 3.59; *Libanius. Decl*. 13.19, 52; *SHA Alex. Sev*. 18.2; *Marcus Aurelius, Med*. 27.1; *Suetonius. Nero* 34.4 (exclusion of the wicked); see Bremmer (2014), 4.
[71] *Metam*. 11.6.7; 11.15.1.
[72] Alvar and Gordon (2008), 177–92.
[73] *Ibid*., 165–77, 192–203.
[74] Porphyry, *Antr. nymph*. 15 (*The Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey*. Buffalo: Department of Classics, State University of New York, 1969).
[75] Alvar and Gordon (2008), 202.

and moral purity are seen as two sides of the same coin. Second, the personal change in joining the community was at times described through purity language, as was the difference between members and non-members, though the sources are few and vague. Indeed, such language existed already in descriptions of the Classical Mysteries; in the cults spreading in the Hellenistic and Roman East the religious community created through initiation had a greater role in the identity of its members. Therefore, the community could be seen as a permanent, demarcated social body, whose members differed from non-members in their superior behavior and morals, and were marked by their participation in the community's rituals. Purity language as used by and of these later communities could therefore have a more significant ritual and moral focus.

## Illness and healing

There was much overlap between medicine and religion in the ancient world: both were authoritative ways to cope with individual misfortunes, especially of mysterious origins, and both did so through bodily practices. It is therefore unsurprising that many polluting circumstances and purificatory procedures were common to both medical and religious texts.[76] Purification rituals were especially common in the healing cult of Asclepius, as seen for example in the descriptions of second-century chronic patient, Aelius Aristides, who fasts and bathes repeatedly under the instructions of the god.[77] The parallels between healing and purification can be seen also in Aristotle's famous description of tragedy and music as purifying the emotions of pity and fear,[78] or the saying attributed to one of his pupils that "the Pythagoreans used medicine for purification (καθάρσει) of the body, and music for that of the soul."[79]

Indeed, for medical writers from Hippocrates to Galen, *katharsis* is a key term.[80] For these writers, the healthy body maintains its own system for getting rid of pollutants or excesses, and various illnesses are identified as arising from malfunction of this system, requiring external purificatory intervention through drugs, foods, washings, or fumigations, which purge the affected organ or the whole body.[81] For this model, purification is an internal process relating to the relationship between internal substances and organs of the body, which nevertheless can be influenced by external procedures.

[76] Lloyd (2003), 40–60. Chaniotis (1995). See, e.g., Paus. 5.5.11.

[77] Israelowich (2012), 92–8.

[78] *Poet*. 1449b, *Pol*. 1341b–42a. Aristotle's theory had little impact before the third century CE; see Lautner (2001).

[79] Aristoxenus, fr. 26 Wehrli with Provenza (2012); see Pl. *Crat*. 405-a-b. Purification leads to healing, Diod. Sic. 3.58.2.

[80] Von Staden (2007); Mattern (2008), 153: "Perhaps the most dominant therapeutic concept in the case histories is the evacuation of excess, which Galen often calls catharsis."

[81] Parker (1983), 207–34; Hoessly (2001); von Staden (2007); Israelowich (2012), 37–55.

Another model, found in some descriptions of plagues and illnesses throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, is that of intrusion and infection by external evil influences, animate or not.[82] While for the medical theorists *katharsis* is a bodily process in which agency and moral value do not have a significant role, invasion etiologies gave much more room for external agency. Illness was frequently seen as a result of the anger of divine beings for sins, crimes, or ritual negligence, or of magical action by a personal enemy; healing required ritual action directed at these beings.[83] The actions of these agents were described through various images: fragmentation and re-integration of body parts, striking, application of drugs, removal of the diseased organ, as well as pollution and purification. The latter is most explicit in the fifth-century tract *On the Sacred Disease*, where evil divinities are said to cause the disease and healing can be achieved by their banishment.[84] Thus illness and healing provide yet another perspective on the relationship of "external" and "internal" purity. Like religious ritual, medical practices treated conditions impacting both internal and external organs, both the body and the soul. They were therefore a site of elaboration of theories and practices concerning the relationship between external action and internal change of the individual. The usage of purification concepts to refer to medical procedures underlines that purity and pollution may be a way of relating to changes in the individual human body, without any attempt to create religious or social structures.

## Philosophy and asceticism

The ascetic trend in the Roman period, which was strongly influenced by these ideas, may be described as a way of life leading to virtue and even self-divinization through the refinement of the body so that the soul be freed of its obstructions, and of the soul so that it dominate the body.[85] Purification of body and soul were emphasized in Middle and Neoplatonism, a central philosophical current in the early Roman Empire, and especially in the works of writers of the movement known as Neopythagoreanism.[86] These currents, however, were not the

[82] Classical: Plat. *Resp*. 406d–e; Sophoc. *Oed. tyr*. 29–34, 114–19; Eur. *Bacc*. 438, 450–1; *Hipp*. 316ff; Padel (1992), 49–58.

[83] Sins and ritual negligence: Chaniotis (1995); Gordon (1995). Magical adversaries: Graf (1992). Appeasement of the divine and purification: Merkelbach and Stauber (1996). Contagion in plagues: Grmek (1984); Nutton (2000); Gourevitch (2013).

[84] Van der Eijk (1990).

[85] See, in general, Meredith (1976). On the first and second centuries: Cancik (1977); Francis (1995); Valantasis (2001). On the third and early fourth centuries, see Shaw (1995); Dillon (1995).

[86] See, e.g., Chaeremon, fr. 10, ed. Van der Horst (= Porph., *Abst*. 4.6–8); Seneca, *Vit. Beat*. 5.3, Ep. 4.1; Plutarch, *Rom*. 28.6–7; Epictetus, *Diatr*. 3.21; Alcinous, *Handbook* [ed. Dillon], p. 36; Apuleius, *On Plato* 2.20.247; *Tablet of Cebes* 19; Marcus Aurelius, *Med*. 3.8; Plotinus, *Enn*. 1.2.3–5, 1.6.5, 3.6.5; Porphyry, *Abst*. 1.30–35, 56–7, 2.44–7, 4.20; *Life of Pythagoras* 46; oracle of Apollo cited by Lact. *Inst*. 7.13 [= Fontenrose (1988), fr. 50]. See Trouillarde (1955), 166–210, for a history

only philosophical influence on Roman-era asceticism: others were Stoic and Peripatetic ethics of moderation and a Cynic impulse for counter-culture, which emphasized self-control, autonomy, and adherence to nature, rather than purification.[87] Here I shall briefly trace the relationship between purification of body and soul as it appears in the Platonic tradition.

Plato's formulation of the idea that the body contaminates the soul was highly influential. In the *Phaedo* he explains that it is only in death, with the decoupling of soul from body, that true knowledge can be obtained; until then,

> we shall be nearest to knowledge (*τοῦ εἰδέναι*) when we avoid, so far as possible, intercourse and communion with the body…keep[ing] ourselves pure from it until God himself sets us free. And in this way, freeing ourselves from the foolishness of the body and being pure (*καθαροί*), we shall, I think, be with those of this kind and shall know of ourselves all that is unalloyed (*μετὰ τοιούτων τε ἐσόμεθα καὶ γνωσόμεθα δι' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν πᾶν τὸ εἰλικρινές*)—and that is, perhaps, the truth. For it may be that it is not allowed for the impure to attain the pure (*μὴ καθαρῷ γὰρ καθαροῦ ἐφάπτεσθαι μὴ οὐ θεμιτὸν ᾖ*).[88]

According to this passage it appears that true knowledge cannot be attained in embodied life, since total purity is not available either; nevertheless, it is possible and desirable to approximate such knowledge by disentanglement from the body, in order to attain it fully after death. A little further on in the *Phaedo*, Plato describes both the virtues and wisdom as methods for achieving purification (even if partial): "self-restraint and justice and courage are a kind of purification (*κάθαρσίς τις*)…and wisdom itself is a kind of rite to purify us (*ἡ φρόνησις μὴ καθαρμός τις ᾖ* 69c)."[89] These purifications are compared to the rites of the mysteries, which allow initiates to "dwell with the gods" in the afterlife. In other dialogues, the relationship of the soul with the body is more complex. The soul is divided into three parts, and the issue is then not so much the purification of soul from body, but rather the purification of the lower part of the soul from the influence of the body, achieved through the dominance of the higher parts.[90]

of this idea in Platonism. Notable for the religious expression of Platonic theory are the Hermetic treatises; for self-purification in this literature see, e.g., *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.22–23; 13.7–15.

[87] Foucault (1997), 274, comments that "in Stoic ethics the question of purity was nearly nonexistent or, rather, marginal," as opposed to Neoplatonic and Pythagorean circles; for a similar judgment regarding its marginality in Roman philosophy, see Cancik (1977). For some exceptions see note above. For Cynic asceticism, see Goulet-Cazé (1986).

[88] Plato, *Phaed*. 67a–b; see Moulinier (1952), 323–410; Parker (1983), 281; White (1989), 45–62. For the reception of this passage in early Christianity and Middle Platonism, see Dillon (1983); Brisson (2004).

[89] 69c. For the relationship of wisdom and the virtues in Plato's purificatory processes, see Gooch (1974); Beere (2011).

[90] Plato, *Resp*. book 4; *Phaedr*. 245–9. For an overview of Plato's thought on the soul, see Miller (2006); for the significance of this for Platonic views on asceticism, Dillon (1995).

Many of the sayings attributed to Pythagoras, a semi-mythical figure, addressed the requirement to purify the soul of its defilements in order to attain wisdom and be closer to the divine. Purification was to be attained not only through virtues and philosophy, but also through specific rituals, possibly practiced by some groups in the early Empire: abstinence from meat and beans, and prohibitions on breaking bread, dipping hands in holy water, travelling by the main roads, entering a temple shod, and myriad others.[91] Many of the regulations were found in other cults, but only temporarily, to designate the time of a festival or a visit to the temple. Pythagoreans thus adapted rules used in Greek society to create groups with permanent enhanced purity.[92] Here I take Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, written in the first half of the third century, and the works of Porphyry, written in its second half, as examples for the Roman-era emphasis on religious purity and purification in asceticism.[93]

The *Life of Apollonius* portrays this first-century philosopher and miracle-worker as a successor of Pythagoras.[94] He refuses to eat meat "as impure (οὔτε καθαράς) and dulling the mind" (1.8), eating only fruit, and "would not stain the altars with blood," but with incense alone (1.1), the best offering for divination (5.25). His clothing was of "unadulterated linen…the gift of unadulterated water and earth" (1.32). Apollonius overcame sexual passion already in his adolescence, and never married (1.13); death and murder are so polluting to him that he cannot enter Judea (5.27) or talk with a murderer before his purification (6.5). These and other abstinences and purity observances allow a person "to recognize his own soul," and also give him the gift of prophecy (8.7). In a speech in the temple of Asclepius, he explains that the gods accept in their temples only those with a "clear conscience," but are angry at those entering with a "besmirched and corrupt" conscience (1.11). In his extensive travels he meets other ascetics who serve as examples for best conduct. The most outstanding, living in India, explain that one who foretells the future must be "of a healthy disposition, with no pollution besmirching (μήτε κηλῖδα προσμεμάχθαι) his soul, and no scars of sin traced on his mind" (3.42); those who wish to study philosophy in that country are examined for purity of conduct on many levels, and their forebears are examined as well (2.30).

In sum, in Philostratus' *Life*, enhanced ritual purity, together with exceptional moral conduct, self-control, and intellectual pursuits lead to exceptional feats, prophecy, and semi-divinization. Both the ritual and the moral virtues required are not innovative, but they are taken to the extreme for the creation of the figure of the holy man. This holiness is not opposed to that of traditional religion, but a focusing of its powers on the individual: according to one of his letters (66), Apollonius would live in a temple.[95]

[91] Burkert (1972), 166–92.
[92] As argued by Burkert (1972), 175–8, followed by Parker (1983), 292–8, 304.
[93] For the reorientation of philosophy towards religion, see Marx-Wolf (2010a).
[94] For Pythagoreanism and purity in the *Life*, see Francis (1995), 98–130; Flinterman (2009).
[95] See Reimer (2003), 143–74.

While Philostratus' work presented the holy man to the public, Porphyry developed the philosophical underpinnings of this ascetic movement.[96] In the *Sentences*, closely following upon the words of his teacher Plotinus, Porphyry explains that there are four classes of virtues which humans should strive for: political, purificatory (καθαρτικῶν), intellectual, and "paradigmatic."[97] The latter two, if at all attainable in this life, are only for the select few; the first consists of the virtues which allow people to live together. The second, purificatory virtues are those to which "we ought to direct our attention most of all" (32.95). These virtues "consist in detaching oneself from the things of this realm . . . [in abstaining] from actions in concert with the body and from participating in the passions which affect it" (32.16–18). The aim of purification is advancement to the next set of virtues, and ultimately—assimilation to God (32.32). In practice, purification of the soul from the influence of the body is performed by the suppression of pleasure, pain, anger, and fear; "desire for anything base must be eliminated altogether," especially desire for sexual intercourse, food and drink (32.123–6). Purification can also be assisted by rituals such as vegetal offerings or prayer, which bring spiritual powers to bear upon the lower part of the soul, that which interacts with the body.[98] The need to purify the soul from the body in order to draw close to god and the conceptualization of vice as defilement of the soul is reiterated several times in a letter to his wife, Marcella.[99]

It is in the expansion of the purificatory role of the abstinence from food, and especially animal meat, that Porphyry deviated from the teachings of Plotinus. In his *On Abstinence*, Porphyry provides historical, philosophical, and cross-cultural arguments for the defilement of eating meat. Originally, in the golden age of purity, humans would not eat other animals; this only occurred following an awful crime, or perhaps a period of starvation (1.5–13). Eating meat is akin to murder, and also to cannibalism, according to the doctrine of metempsychosis. But especially, meat pollutes the soul by tying it strongly to the body. Animal sacrifices are dangerous also because they draw evil demons who feed upon them (2.35–40). A link is drawn between the temporary abstinence from impurity as a preparation for temple rituals and the permanent abstinence required for philosophers who wish to return their souls to their original state and assimilate to god (2.44–6); this is especially seen in examples from "barbarian" priests and sects, such as Egyptian priests or Jewish Essenes, who in their extensive purity regulations present the best example of how the gods should be approached (Book 4).

[96] On Porphyry and purification, ritual and philosophical, see Meredith (1976); the articles reproduced in Clark (2011), part 3; Marx-Wolf (2010a); Bouffartigue and Patillon (1977–2011), esp. the notes to Vol. 3. For Neoplatonic attitudes towards purity and Judaism, see Scrofani (2008).

[97] *Sent*. 32, closely corresponding to *Enn*. 1.2. See Dillon (1983); Brisson (2004). Translations from Dillon and Brisson (2005), Vol. 2.

[98] Fr. 290F Smith. [99] *Marc*. 9–11, 13, 14, 26, 28, 33.

It is in this context that Porphyry presents a general theory of purity: defilement is the mixing of opposites, purification is their separation. The soul is therefore contaminated when mixed with the body, humans are contaminated when eating animals, and sexual intercourse contaminates both partners (4.20).[100] This attempt at a general definition demonstrates the central place purity attained in the thought of the age; it is a principle which cuts across the domains of history, cosmology, anthropology, theology, and religious practice. Despite this expansion, and especially the new focus on the persona and psychology of the philosopher or holy man in the subjugation of the passions, the practical methods used to achieve purity are very similar to those practiced for many centuries: abstinence from certain foods and drinks and abstinence from sexual activity.

## Impure purifications and failed rituals

Purification was not always seen as positive or efficacious. Throughout antiquity, writers attacked certain rituals as irrational, ill-founded, foreign, and dangerous, as opposed to authoritative, traditional, and pious practices. The identification of such rituals changed with the times, but purification rituals were usually high on the list.[101] For example, in his essay *On Superstition*, Plutarch targets "the ridiculous actions and emotions of superstition . . . rushing about and beating of drums, impure purifications and dirty sanctifications (ἀκάθαρτοι μὲν καθαρμοὶ ῥυπαραὶ δ' ἁγνεῖαι), barbarous and outlandish penances" (107b) as well as "magic purifications (περιμάκτρια) . . . smearing with mud, wallowing in filth, immersions" (166a).[102] Foreign influence, an excess of emotional involvement, and lack of authority and decorum appear to be the main problems for Plutarch.[103] According to Greek writers, foreigners (Egyptians, Magians, Judeans) emphasized purification in their religious practice. Some deployed this trope positively, as demonstrating their piety,[104] while others, combining it with the trope of lustful and luxurious exoticism, utilized it for ridiculing exotic cults.[105] Another argument against the "wrong" purification rituals was that they were external and mechanical, not reflecting true, internal change; they were therefore an attempt to coerce the gods mechanically rather than to persuade them to act; alternatively, they simply did not have the power

[100] For this passage see especially Clark (2001), reprinted in Clark (2011), 41–51.

[101] *On the Sacred Disease*; Theoph. *Charac.* 16.

[102] cf. *Life of Alexander* 75.1. For purifications in magical settings, see Ov. *Metam.* 7.257–63; Statius, 4.414–18; Tibullus *Elegies* 1.2.60; Thessalus of Trales, *de virtutibus herbarum* 20–1.

[103] For this text, see Martin (2004).

[104] Herodian 2.81; Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 3–8; Porphyry, *Abst.* 4; *Life of Plotinus* 10; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 8.7; see Borgeaud (2013).

[105] Lucian, *Dial. Mort.* 21.6–7; *Philops.* 11.

to do so.[106] Yet another argument (if it can be called that) is simply that these purification rituals are disgusting and dirty, and therefore self-contradictory.[107]

## Summary

This survey demonstrates the variety of purity discourses enacted in the eastern Roman Empire. Purity issues focused on religious places and rituals, i.e., on places and actions related to the gods, who both required purity and, in certain cases, had the power to purify. However, religious ritual was in fact only the most visible and articulated aspect of the broader role purity discourse played in social life, as a way to talk about disgust, moral action and value, misfortune, or illness.

A complex picture arises regarding sin and defilement in Greek and Roman thought and practice. Preparatory purity rituals marked out the place of the gods relative to the human body; purification of social and especially cultic crimes, and annual purifications of the community in the main ritual assisted in the reintegration of those who breached social and religious order. The use of language of sexual purity concerning married women helped to sustain and create gender hierarchies and delineate proper social order, while in parallel more radical discourses of sexual abstinence were exceptions that proved, and perhaps strengthened, the norm. Seen thus, the main moral dimension of purity rituals concerns its maintenance of social structures, and the discourse in general is of the "truce," rather than the "battle" type.

However, purity discourse could also go against social structures by providing individuals and new communities with the power to purify themselves through ritual actions. As seen from the appeal of asceticism and the centrality of purification in various communal cults, this role was on the rise from the second century BCE onwards, although it had its roots in older texts and practices. These individual and small-group purity discourses combined elements from the preparatory and main purity rituals of the traditional cults, to create individual regimens which could be practiced independently. Purification was internalized to a dynamic occurring inside the person, becoming an end in itself, in parallel to its being a temporary means to approach the sacred. With time, institutionalized religion in the form of temples also adopted this discourse, as it is found in the emphasis on purity of mind in the cultic regulations. In this sense, the second century BCE onwards sees the rise of a battle type of purity, in which defilement is seen as an enemy to be vanquished. However, while such trends can be identified, no one element prevails at any point. The traditional practices and discourses of purity continue well into the third and

[106] *On the Sacred Disease*. 1; Ov. *Fast*. 2.35–53.
[107] See already Herac. fr. 5, cited, e.g., Apollonius of Tyana, *Ep*. 27.

fourth centuries CE (and perhaps beyond) in parallel to the new ones; and these "new" discourses were already intimated in the writings of Plato or Euripides, and the purifications in the shrines of Asclepius.

## JUDAISM, FROM LEVITICUS TO THE MISHNA

Though in many respects similar to other Greco-Roman purity discourses, Jewish purity discourses in the Hellenistic and Roman periods are unique on several points. First, due to common ethnic identity and the canonical status of the Hebrew Bible, practices of purity and defilement in this period have a more unified social and textual basis than in contemporary Greco-Roman cultures. Thus, although there was much diversity between various late Second Temple Jewish sects as well as changes over time, these were never divorced from the prescripts and language of the Bible. Second, various types of bodily purification were practiced more widely in Jewish than in most contemporary religions, not only by priests but also by lay people, making it a central facet of religious ritual and discourse. Third, purity rules appearing in Jewish texts, which were probably practiced at least to some degree, were highly intricate, detailed, and systematized.

### Purity and defilement in the Hebrew Bible

Purity (ט.ה.ר, *ṭ.h.r*) and defilement (of the root ט.מ.א, *ṭ.m.ʾ*) are central terms for the biblical authors, especially in Leviticus and Numbers, most of which are usually identified with sources P and H, but appearing throughout the Bible.[108] These terms cover a wide and complex linguistic field, corresponding to what must have been an important aspect of Israelite religion.[109] As Tracey Lemos argues, all attempts to force biblical purity notions into one, or even several systems, are ultimately unsuccessful and derive from an undue emphasis on the symbolic level over that of the ritual actions themselves.[110] As in Classical Greece, biblical purity discourse was used across several domains: to mark certain spaces, times, and persons as sacred and closer to the divine; to manage

[108] The following outline will not address distinctions between different biblical sources, as these are irrelevant for the late Second Temple, rabbinic, and early Christian discussions.

[109] Much scholarly effort has been directed at constructing a typology and system of this field; some of the most important attempts in the past decades are Wright (1991); Milgrom (1991); Jenson (1992); Kugler (1997); Klawans (2000). There have been many proposals for the function or meaning of the biblical purity system: a summary in Milgrom (1993) mentions "sin, esthetics, fear of demons, holiness of sanctuary, separation of Israel, health, enhancing priestly power," and "polarity between life and death" (the option supported by Milgrom himself).

[110] Lemos (2013).

and express the biological, social, and emotional dangers of birth, death, and illness; to direct and articulate disgust towards asocial or sinful actions, and to provide means for expiation and reconciliation following such actions; and to articulate processes of individual change. As opposed to Classical Greece, however, the Bible commonly uses purity discourses to differentiate between Israel, as a community close to God, and other nations.

Sources of impurity in the Bible are commonly divided by scholars into two main types, tolerated and prohibited.[111] Tolerated defilements are those associated with common bodily phenomena, as follows:[112]

1. Sexual defilements: menstruation (15:19–24), semen (15:16–18), irregular genital emissions by men or women (15:2–15, 25–30), and birth (12:2–8);
2. Death-related defilements: the human corpse (Num 11:11–20) and certain animal carcasses (5:2–3, 11:24–47);
3. *ṣaraʿat* (צרעת)—a certain skin disease (in humans, 13:1–14:32) or fungus (in clothes or buildings, 14:33–57).

The mechanisms of defilement and purification are complex, and I shall observe here only the following. Tolerated defilements are purified according to the severity of the defilement: minor impurities (animal carcasses, regular genital discharges) require only washing and waiting for a day or a week, while major ones (human corpse, *ṣaraʿat*, irregular genital discharges) require longer waiting periods and *ḥaṭṭat* sacrifices. According to some scholars, the sacrifices are required because these defilements pollute the sanctuary's altar from afar, and only a sacrifice can purify the altar (5:2–3, 13:1–31; 15:13–15, 29–30).[113] The major impurities are communicable, defiling also people or objects touching them or under the same roof with them, though the defilement is weakened as it is passed along, and can then be purified with a lesser ritual (e.g., 15:5–8, 21–3). In its communicability, pollution acts as a quasi-physical substance, described by various scholars as a "ray" or "viscous gas."[114] In general, contracting these defilements is not a sin; only entering sacred space while defiled, eating of the sacrifices (7.20–1; 22:1–7, Num 9:6–7), and in certain cases delaying purification (17:15–16, Num 19:13, 20, perhaps Lev 5:2–3) are considered sinful. To priests and the *nazir*, who must maintain a higher degree of holiness, contracting corpse impurity and eating carrion is prohibited (21:1–5, 22:8, Num 6:6–7; cf. Ez 44:15–31, Jud 13:14).

[111] This is the terminology of Wright (1991) and Hayes (2007). For other terms, see Klawans (2000), 13–17, who uses "ritual" and "moral," respectively, and Haber (2008), 9–30. For criticism of the terms "ritual" and "moral" as anachronistic see Kazen (2002), 214–22. Impurity is also created as a by-product of certain sacrifices, which we do not discuss here; see Wright (1991), 154.

[112] Biblical citations in this section are to the book of Leviticus unless otherwise noted.

[113] See Milgrom (1976); Sklar (2005). For criticism of this view, see Maccoby (1999), 165–81; Gane (2005), 144–62.

[114] Maccoby (1999), 18–19.

Purification from tolerated defilements is required in order to approach the holy (ק.ד.ש, *q.d.š*), another central root.[115] God's holiness is extended to the temple, cult objects, sacrifices, and priests, but also to Israel as a whole (19:2, 20:7, 26). Therefore, although the temple, the sacrifices, and the priesthood are the focus of most biblical purity requirements, some verses concern requirements of distancing from defilements to allow for God's continuing presence among the people of Israel. Thus, as opposed to Classical Greek religion, the Hebrew Bible—or at least certain parts of it—calls for some bodily purity requirements even beyond sacred space.[116] This is especially pronounced regarding the dietary laws (Lev 11, Deut 14:3–20), which describe certain animals as defiled and/or disgusting, and therefore prohibited for consumption.[117]

Prohibited defilements (described using *ṭ.m.*ʾ but also as *toʿeva* (תועבה) "abomination" and similar terms) arise from major sins, namely certain idolatrous practices (sacrifice to the Molech (20:1–3) and necromancy (19:31)), murder (Num 35:33–4) sexual sins (principally incest, adultery, and sex between men, 18), and purposefully polluting sacred objects (7:19–21, 22:3–7).[118] Such sins produce a defilement which impacts the persons involved, the land of Israel, and the sanctuary, and lead to the expulsion of Israel from the land (18:24–30, Ez 36:17, Jer 3:1). The defiling sins are identified with the practices of the former inhabitants of the Canaan. The defilement of Israel by sins, especially idolatry and sexual sin, is frequently deplored by the prophets (Jer 2:7, 23, Hos 6:10, Ez 16:36–63, 36:16–25, Ps 106:34–41), who call for moral purification in the present and refer to Israel's purification by God in the eschaton. In a related usage, women who took part in non-marital sexual relations or were victims of rape are said to be defiled (Gen 13:34; Num 5:11–31; Deut 24:4); Eve Levavi Feinstein explains this usage as expressing the idea that a woman is the property of her father/husband, and is severely damaged by non-marital sexual acts.[119]

The question of the moral implications of defilement thus revolves around three points: (1) the moral significance of tolerated defilements; (2) the nature of prohibited defilement and its modes of purification; and (3) the relationship between tolerated and prohibited defilements.

[115] For the relationship between holiness and purity, see Milgrom (1991), 731–3; Jenson (1992), 40–55; Kugler (1997); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 32, 36–42.

[116] Lev 11:43–4, 20:25–6; cf. Num 5:2–4. There is a scholarly controversy regarding the ambit of biblical purity regulations—as focusing on the temple only ("minimalists") or as requiring purity also in the lay sphere ("maximalists"). Representatives of the first camp are Neusner (1973); Maccoby (1999); Feder (2013); of the second are Alon (1977), 190–234 and Milgrom (1991), 976–85.

[117] For the classification of the dietary laws as tolerated or prohibited defilements, see Wright (1991), 165–9; Klawans (2000), 31–2. Meshel (2008) argues that Lev 11:1–43 uses all six variables of consumption/contact, im/pure, permitted/prohibited with great precision to create a three-dimensional matrix of the animal kingdom.

[118] See Klawans (2000), 26–31.

[119] Levavi Feinstein (2014), 42–99.

1. *The moral significance of tolerated defilements*: Tolerated defilements arise from natural bodily occurrences, which the Bible usually did not describe as sinful or as punishments for sin (with the exception of *ṣaraʿat*, which it does [Num 12:10–12, 2 Kg 5:27, 15:5]). Nevertheless, this does not mean that they do not have moral significance, when seen in a broad perspective. As in ancient Greece and Rome, choice of the specific occurrences which are considered as defilements has social and cultural ramifications, even if they are not linked to willfully sinful behavior. Furthermore, the support of certain specific socio-religious structures (the temple, the priesthood) through purity rituals is also significant.

2. *Prohibited defilement and its purification*: The Bible's descriptions of prohibited actions as defiling appears to have two functions—first, instilling a sense of disgust in the audience towards these actions as unnatural acts, dangerous to the community and performed only by outsiders; second, creating a theological–ritual framework for their understanding and management: God hates such sins, and therefore they lead to divine punishment, or, in certain cases, they may be purified through sacrifices of atonement, namely the *ḥaṭṭat* and *asham* sacrifices.

Following Jacob Milgrom, a number of scholars have demonstrated that כ.פ.ר. (*k.p.r.*), a root which designates the action of the blood of various sacrifices, does not mean only "atone" but rather refers both to expiation of inadvertent sin (4:1–5:13) and purification of the temple, altar, and/or sinner from the defilement created by these sins.[120] The juxtaposition of sin and defilement is especially clear in the Day of Atonement rituals (sacrifices and penance), which both purify the sins of Israel and absolve the priests, the temple, and Israel (16:30-34); these rituals do not purify only inadvertent sins, but rather "all sins" (16:30, 34). Elsewhere the Bible articulates the view that Israel's sins were so severe as to be purified only by the punishments of exile and destruction (18:27–8; Num 35:33–4).

3. *The relationship between tolerated and prohibited defilements*: In an influential study, Jonathan Klawans argued that the two types are essentially independent systems of purity, one concerning natural biological functions and the other concerning sin (though some overlaps are conceded).[121] Other scholars, however, argue that the types share many elements and therefore cannot be independent.[122] For example, both systems are conceptualized in opposition to the holiness of the temple; menstruation does not only defile but also makes sexual contact prohibited (Lev 18:19). Most important, *ḥaṭṭat* sacrifices are instrumental in the purification both of major tolerated defilements and of inadvertent prohibited

[120] Milgrom (1976); Wright (1991), 159–60; Sklar (2005), 148–59. And see Schwartz (1995), for whom sin does not cause impurity but is rather objectified in a way analogous to impurity and is dealt with in similar sacrificial rituals. There is much disagreement among the scholars cited regarding the precise objects of purification (temple, altar, or sinner) and the mechanisms of purification.

[121] Klawans (2000), 32–38; *contra*, e.g., Neusner (1973), 108.

[122] See Kazen (2008); Nihan (2013); Lemos (2013), 288.

defilements. In general, as David Wright has argued, tolerated and prohibited impurities are better seen as parts of a spectrum, and not as discrete types.[123] The various parts of the spectrum echo each other, and by upholding the laws of tolerated impurity, the laws of prohibited impurity are strengthened as well.[124]

The spectrum extends, at its less ritual ends, to discourse of purification from sins following penance or in the eschaton. David implores God to "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and purify me from my sin… Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow… Create in me a pure heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Ps 51:4, 9, 12),[125] and Ezekiel promises that God "will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be pure from all your defilements. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you" (36:25–6).[126] Such verses were to be extremely influential for the future development in the understanding of penance and change of heart as purifications.

## Purity and defilement in Late Second Temple Judaism

Texts of the Second Temple period such as Ezra and Nehemiah, Jubilees, Enoch, the varied Qumran documents, and the Greek authors Philo and Josephus, as well as the archeological record, all provide evidence for the continuing importance of the whole spectrum of biblical purity discourse, both in Judaea and the diaspora.[127]

The sources of tolerated impurity and their methods of transmission and purification are discussed and developed extensively in the Dead Sea Scrolls, both in texts of a sectarian nature and those considered to have reflected wider Jewish society.[128] There is much evidence for observation of the rules of tolerated impurity also in the earliest strata of Tannaitic literature,[129] as well as in

[123] Wright (1991); Kazen (2008).

[124] Wright (1991), 170–81.

[125] MT: הֶרֶב כַּבְּסֵנִי מֵעֲוֹנִי וּמֵחַטָּאתִי טַהֲרֵנִי (4)…תְּחַטְּאֵנִי בְּאֵזוֹב וְאֶטְהָר תְּכַבְּסֵנִי וּמִשֶּׁלֶג אַלְבִּין (9)…לֵב טָהוֹר (12)…בְּרָא-לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ נָכוֹן חַדֵּשׁ בְּקִרְבִּי. LXX 50: (4) *ἐπὶ πλεῖον πλῦνόν με ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνομίας μου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας μου καθάρισόν με…*(9) *ῥαντιεῖς με ὑσσώπῳ, καὶ καθαρισθήσομαι· πλυνεῖς με, καὶ ὑπὲρ χιόνα λευκανθήσομαι…*(12) *καρδίαν καθαρὰν κτίσον ἐν ἐμοί, ὁ θεός, καὶ πνεῦμα εὐθὲς ἐγκαίνισον ἐν τοῖς ἐγκάτοις μου.*

[126] MT: וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מַיִם טְהוֹרִים וּטְהַרְתֶּם, מִכֹּל טֻמְאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל-גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם. וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֵּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם. LXX: *καὶ ῥανῶ ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ὕδωρ καθαρόν, καὶ καθαρισθήσεσθε ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἀκαθαρσιῶν ὑμῶν καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν εἰδώλων ὑμῶν, καὶ καθαριῶ ὑμᾶς. καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν καρδίαν καινὴν καὶ πνεῦμα καινὸν δώσω ἐν ὑμῖν.* See also Is 1:16, 4:3–4; Jer 4:14: Job 9:30; Ps 73:13. Lawrence (2006), 35–7. Such images are seen by Klawans as metaphorical, since they do not evoke a system of purity and defilement but are ad hoc usages, an exception deemed arbitrary by Kazen (2008), 43–64, at 45.

[127] For purity in the diaspora, see Sanders (1990), 255–308. For an overview on purity in the Second Temple period, see Birenboim (2006).

[128] Two recent surveys are Harrington (2004); Werrett (2007).

[129] Neusner (1974); Noam (2008); Furstenberg (2016).

Josephus and Philo.[130] Indeed, purity requirements seem to have become more entrenched and widespread than in prior periods. Archaeological excavations in areas of Jewish settlement in Palestine have uncovered large numbers of purity baths (*miqvaot*) beginning from the late second century BCE, as well as an unusual number of chalkstone vessels (usually seen as evidence of purity observance, as stone was considered impervious to impurity).[131] The texts of the period, too, indicate an expansion of concern with purity from tolerated defilements in daily life, outside of the temple and its personnel.[132] This enhanced sensitivity to impurity proceeded on two fronts: on the one hand, more places, objects, and states were considered sacred and therefore susceptible to impurity, and, on the other, the powers of contagion of the sources of defilement were intensified. Combined, these developments meant that many more Jews who were not priests were concerned about impurity and performed purifications as part of their daily life, and that tolerated defilement may have been seen as a negative status even when no contact with temple, sacrifices, or tithes was envisioned. Furthermore, the degree of maintenance of purity even from tolerated defilement in daily life could now be used as an index for piety, prestige, and group identity.

### *Food impurity, sectarianism, and initiation*

The Pharisees, the Dead Sea Sect, and the Essenes, sects in first-century BCE and first-century CE Judea, appear to have maintained a degree of purity while eating regular food (*ḥullin*), though there is much controversy as to the extent of this observation and its significance.[133] Some scholars see *ḥullin*-purity as an attempt to extend the holiness of the temple and the sacrifices to the communal meal, perhaps as an alternative to the temple, while others argue it was a personal ascetic practice, "purity for its own sake."[134] The trajectory set by the innovation of *ḥullin* purity is joined by several sources which require washing for purity before prayer and Torah-reading, thus extending the holiness of the temple to these common individual and communal religious activities—and implicitly to the body of the religious practitioner—even before the destruction

[130] Neusner (1973), 38–50; Nakman (2004), 170–254; Leonhardt-Balzer (2001), 256–72.

[131] Wright (1997); Adler and Amit (2010).

[132] For the biblical background to this question see above, n. 115. For the Second Temple period, see Sanders (1990), 131–254; Harrington (1995); Regev (2000); Poirier (2003); Himmelfarb (2006), 85–114; Kazen (2010), 1–12.

[133] See *t. Demai* 2.2, 1QS 7.16–25. A new mechanism, "graded purification," required defiled people to bathe for partial purification, even before they performed the full purification process. This allowed them to eat *ḥullin* at a certain low level of purity, even if not to enter the temple or eat sacrifices and tithes. See Alon (1977), 152–7; Regev (2000); Kazen (2010), 113–36.

[134] For this controversy, see Alon (1977); Neusner (1973), 64–71 and references above, n. 132. Quote from Sanders (1990), 192.

of the Jerusalem temple.[135] Some scholars, however, point out that most of the evidence for purity requirements in these cases is from Greek Jewish texts from the diaspora, and not in Palestinian sources such as the Dead Sea Scrolls or the early Rabbis, which are interested in extra-temple purity as a requirement for eating much more than for liturgical activity.[136]

Observation of *ḥullin* purity had potentially explosive social significance, as it could come hand-in-hand with the creation of groups of relatively pure Jews who would abstain from eating their daily meals with those they deemed defiled, and more generally to the emergence of purity from tolerated defilements as a group-relative or even individual status rather than an objective status, and to the perception of outsiders to the group as defiled.[137] Actual evidence for such a development, however, is slim. The strongest case can be made for the Dead Sea Sect. According to comparisons between the purity laws found in P, in the early rabbinic sources, and in the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially the *Damascus Covenant* and the *Temple Scroll*, the Sect generally called for stricter purity requirements than the Rabbis did later on (and in certain cases also more than P, though this is more controversial).[138] According to the *Damascus Covenant* and the *Community Rule*, the sect saw itself as superior to non-members, "Sons of Darkness" who did not accept the Sect's beliefs and rituals; the *War Scroll* opposes the sect as the "Sons of Light" to the "Sons of Darkness."[139] This superiority, however, was not based primarily on adherence to stricter purity rules but on the whole system of the sect's ritual and belief.[140] Furthermore, the laws on tolerated impurities in the Scrolls, though strict, are almost always concerned with the ritual details and are very rarely linked to the demonic or to sin.

More significant evidence for the sect's self-perception as purer than the rest of Jewish society comes from the description of the initiation process in the *Community Rule*. This description also provides the clearest indications for a blend between qualities taken from purification from bodily defilements and those taken from purification from sin. The *Community Rule* describes initiation into the sect as involving washing in water, and states that this washing allowed the initiate to "share in the pure food of the men of holiness" (1QS 5.13). The Community Rule states that the unrighteous and unrepentant may not take part in initiation, arguing that such people remain impure:

[135] Regev (2000), 177–8, 186–92; Lawrence (2006), 56–64; Adler (2008); Haber (2008), 161–80.

[136] Noam (2007), 133 n.20; Feder (2009). See *Judith* 12.8; *Lett. Arist*. 304–6; *A.J*. 2.159 (on the Essenes), 12.106; *Sib. Or*. 3.591–3; *T. Levi* 2.3 (preparation of Levi before ascent to heaven); and the lifestyle of the Therapeutae as described by Philo, *Contemp*. 25–8.

[137] See Baumgarten (1997), 91–100; Furstenberg (2016).

[138] See Harrington (1993); Noam (2009b); Feder (2014).

[139] 1QS 3.13–4.18; *CD* 1.1–4.4.

[140] Himmelfarb (2006), 85. See also Newton (1985), 33–4; Conway (2000); Regev (2003).

> [He] shall not enter the council of the community . . . because he plows in the mud of wickedness and there are stains on his conversion . . . He shall not become clean by the acts of atonement, nor shall he be purified by the cleansing waters . . . For it is by the spirit of the true counsel of God that the paths of man are absolved, all his iniquities, so that he can look at the light of life. And it is by the holy spirit of the community, in its truth, that he is cleansed of all his iniquities . . . And by the compliance of his soul with all the laws of God his flesh is cleansed by being sprinkled with cleansing waters and being made holy with the waters of repentance.[141]

Initiation has two sides, moral and ritual, in both action and result: to produce an efficacious initiation, both a change of heart and physical washing are required; and the result of initiation is both a purifying of sins and allowing participation in the pure meal of the community.[142] In this description, the physical ritual and the mental and emotional states or decisions of the initiate are blended together.

Some degree of blending of moral and ritual purity is present in the Dead Sea Scrolls in other dimensions as well, though its extent is debated.[143] First, sins are frequently described using harsh language of impurity and disgust.[144] For example, the term *niddah*, technically connoting menstruation, is used to describe sinfulness;[145] the term "abomination" is used frequently to speak of sin.[146] Second, sinning members of the community are barred from the communal meals, called the "purity of the many (טהרת הרבים)" for various lengths of time, and this would appear to signal their impurity.[147] Third, in a group of liturgies to be said during purification from tolerated impurities,[148] penitential overtones of purification from sin are found as well, with the liturgies mentioning "sin," "guilt," "atonement," and "purification of righteousness." Due to their extremely fragmentary state, it is difficult to say much more about the meaning of these phrases. Nevertheless, it is clear that these liturgies indicate "a definite awareness of the spiritual overtones of lustration."[149]

Jonathan Klawans, in his seminal *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, summed up the evidence thus: "at Qumran, sin was considered to be ritually defiling, and sinners had to purify themselves . . . those who became ritually impure had not only to purify themselves, but to atone as well."[150] Other scholars, however, argue that the language used is not intended as practical instruction,

[141] 1QS 3.2–9. Trans. Garcia Martínez and Tigchelaar 75. לוא יבואו בעצת יחד . . . כיא בסאון רשע מחרשו וגואלים בשובתו . . . לוא יזכה בכפורים ולוא יטהר במי נדה . . . כיא ברוח עצת אמת אל דרכי איש וכופרו כול עוונותו להביט באור החיים וברוח קדושה ליחד באמתו יטהר מכול עוונתם וברוח יושר וענוה תכופר חטתו ובענות נפשו לכול חוקי אל יטהר בשרו להיות במי נדה ולהתקדש במי דוכי

[142] 1QS 2.25–3.9. See Harrington (2008).

[143] See Flusser (1979); Newton (1985), 40–9; Baumgarten (1992); Klawans (2000), 67–91; Himmelfarb (2001); Birenboim (2003); Harrington (2004), 27–30; Lawrence (2006), 111–54.

[144] For many examples, Klawans (2000), 75–80.

[145] 1QS 4.10, 21; *CD* 2.1. [146] 1QH 10.10–11; 1QS 4.21.

[147] 1QS 7.2–25. [148] 4Q512, 4Q414. [149] Baumgarten (1992).

[150] Klawans (2000), 91.

barring the repentance of a ritually defiled person, but is only figurative; that the texts prohibiting sinners from eating the pure food of the sect do so for reasons of punishment and not purity; and that it is not said that sin itself is a ritual impurity, but just that those who are ritually impure cannot be purified if they remain sinful.[151] However, even those scholars who oppose a view of total blending of prohibited and tolerated impurity at Qumran still acknowledge that "the dividing line between uncleanliness and sin in Qumran is not sharply drawn."[152] It is notable that the blurring of this dividing line occurs especially in the initiation ritual: once the community is seen as holier than the outsiders and a ritual is created to cross the dividing line, a reification of the impurity of sin and its purification in the bodies of the initiated is almost inevitable.

### *Sexual sins and genealogical purity*

Conceptions of the impurity of sin also underwent changes in the late Second Temple period, not only in the Dead Sea Sect but in general Jewish society. Of the grave sins of bloodshed, idolatry, and sexual misbehavior, the impurity of the last was greatly emphasized in texts such as Ezra, *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and *4QMMT*.[153]

Furthermore, to the biblical sexual sins of incest, adultery, and sex between men, sex with non-Israelites was added as a defiling sexual sin. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra. 9:1–14, Neh 13:23–7) innovated the notion that the seed of Israel is holy, while children born of a gentile–Israelite union are of degraded status and not fully Israelite ("genealogical purity," as formulated by Christine Hayes). This notion was developed by *Jubilees* (30:7–21), for which sexual contact with a foreigner defiles the future children, the Israelite partner, the nation of Israel, and the land, and is akin to idolatry. While Ezekiel forbids only priests from marrying foreigners, Ezra, *Jubilees*, and *4QMMT* expand this attribute of holiness to Israel as a whole, and furthermore do not recognize the possibility of foreigners converting to Israelite religion. This development reflects a usage of prohibited impurity to mark the borders of the Israelite nation, which these authors perceived to be endangered from the encroachment of external cultures.[154] Thus, at least for some Jewish groups during the fourth to the first centuries BCE, gentiles were considered categorically defiled.

It is clear that this impurity was a consequence of the supposed sinfulness of gentiles and the danger that they would influence Jews. Scholars are divided,

[151] Harrington (2004), 27–30; Himmelfarb (2001), 30–2; Birenboim (2003), n.29; Kister (2009), 525; Ginsburskaya (2010).

[152] Baumgarten (1992), 209.

[153] See Werman (1997); Klawans (2000), 43–63; Hayes (2002), 68–91; Himmelfarb (2006), 66–84; Rosen-Zvi (2006); Loader (2007); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 53–73.

[154] Birenboim (2006), ch. 2, discusses the reasons for this national separatism and its purity manifestations.

however, to what extent this sin impurity translated into contagious bodily impurity.[155] It appears that there was no agreement on the matter in antiquity either, and that certain sects such as the Essenes or the writers of *Jubilees* took a more isolationist stance than other segments of Second Temple Judaism, and perceived gentile impurity as more inherent and physical in nature.[156] Others, however, such as Josephus, Philo, and the early Rabbis, recognized the possibility of conversion, locating the impurity solely in gentiles' sinful deeds. Food prepared by gentiles was also prohibited and described as defiled according to some texts: the heroes of the books of Daniel (1:5–16) and Tobit (1:10–13), from the third to second centuries BCE, abstain from such food; however, it is difficult to know if this was the result of an intrinsic defilement of such food or the concern that gentiles would not take care with its preparation according to the dietary laws.[157]

If in Leviticus only a small number of grave sins are associated with impurity, in many Second Temple texts impurity is seen as a consequence of other sinful behaviors, such as deceit, bribery, and evil thoughts. These usages are frequently linked to biblical mentions of purification from sin in general, such as Is 1:15–17, 64:4–5, and Ps 51.[158]

While sexual sin becomes a central focus for defilement, sexual relations in marriage were legitimate and even positive for the vast majority of Second Temple texts, even if they incurred tolerated defilement. However, some texts expanded this defilement significantly: The *Temple Scroll* prohibits sexual intercourse in the "holy city" (probably Jerusalem), while *Jubilees* and the *Damascus Covenant* prohibited intercourse on the Sabbath.[159] Seminal emissions, including sexual relations, precluded a member of the Dead Sea sect from participating in some of the gatherings of the community. Philo and Pliny report that all the Essenes were celibate, and Josephus says some were; but there is no clear evidence for celibacy of the Dead Sea Sect from either the Scrolls or archeology.[160] The sect may have been independent of the Essenes, or, alternatively, Philo and Pliny expanded the celibacy of a small number to the whole group in their depiction of an ideal group free of sexuality, derived from Greco-Roman models. For Philo, at least, this ideal may be seen also in the description of the Therapeutae as virgins, who remained "pure . . . out of the love of wisdom . . . due to which they are indifferent to the pleasures of the body."[161]

[155] Klawans (1995); Hayes (2002), 68–91; Harrington (2008).

[156] Werman (1997); Hayes (2002), 45–91.

[157] For the former option and additional sources, see Freidenreich (2011), 35–8.

[158] *Temple Scroll* 51.11–15; see Klawans (2000), 51. This generalizing movement is prominent in Philo, who is mainly interested in the influence of sins on the person and not so much in the details of the sins themselves.

[159] *Temple Scroll* 48.14–17; *Jub*. 50.8; *CD* 11.5; 4Q251; see Loader (2009), 363–7; Doering (2000).

[160] Regev (2008); Ilan (2010).

[161] Philo, *Cotemp*. 68; and see below, n. 185.

## The dietary laws

As briefly discussed earlier (p. 40), the dietary laws are based on a notion of natural impurity of certain animals, leading to a prohibition of eating rather than to contagious defilement. In the late Second Temple period, the dietary laws are rarely discussed by Palestinian authors (for whom they were uncontroversial) but are the focus of two notable apologetic discussions in texts from Alexandria, the *Letter of Aristeas* from the late third or second century BCE and Philo's *Special Laws*.[162]

The high priest Eleazar as cited in *Aristeas* identifies the dietary laws as especially intriguing to non-Jews. He then opens the discussion with what may be the earliest explicit theoretical challenge to the logic of the dietary laws: "why, since there is but one form of creation, some animals are regarded as impure for eating, and others even to the touch?" (128–9). In his explanation, Eleazar explains (143) that indeed "all things are alike in their natural constitution (*φυσικὸν λόγον*)"; and yet, the biblical purity and dietary regulations are essential for maintaining the virtues of the Jewish nation, the "men of God." Since the gentiles are typically (though not intrinsically) idolatrous and given over to "meats and drinks and clothing," extensive purity laws are required to prevent their influence on the Jews. Through these laws, God "fenced us round with impregnable ramparts and walls of iron that we might not mingle at all with any of the other nations, remaining pure (*ἁγνοί*) in body and soul." In particular, the impure animals are "symbols" (*παράσημον*, 147) or "signs" (*σημεῖον*, 150) for the practice of virtue, since each symbolizes a certain evil disposition or action of humans through their own behavior.

Dietary purity, for *Aristeas*, is not an ontological statement but an instrument working on several levels: it is not only a form of moral teaching to better a person's soul, but also a social tool. Aristeas does not explain how exactly the dietary and purity laws are supposed to prevent mingling with the nations, and in fact the letter itself positively describes Jews eating with gentiles; it is idolatry and other vices, and not contact with gentiles, that *Aristeas* opposes. Furthermore, contact with gentiles is inherent in the text: the allegorical explanations for the dietary laws have been identified as close to Pythagorean explanations of their own dietary laws, and in general it is claimed that *Aristeas*' arguments "come from within the realm of Greek philosophical polemic."[163] Nevertheless, *Aristeas* identifies the dietary laws as separating Jews from gentiles, an idea already found in the biblical passages which link the separation of the Jews from the gentiles to their holiness.[164] This identification was to become a

[162] Aristeas 128–69 (Hadas, 156–64); Philo, *Spec.* 4.100–131 (Colson VIII.68–90). For discussions of these texts, see Grant (1980); Svebakken (2010); Rosenblum (2010), 36–45; Freidenreich (2011), 31–46.

[163] Honigman (2003), 21.

[164] Deut 14:2, 21; Lev 20:24–6. Milgrom (1991), 718–36. And see similarly in the more strongly worded 4 *Macc.* 4.26, 5.16–29.

common one in the Greco-Roman world, at least according to later first-century sources.[165]

In Philo's interpretation, which draws many elements from Aristeas,[166] the main objective of the dietary laws is to prevent desire (ἐπιθυμία), while the aspects of identity and preventing the evil influence of idolaters are absent.[167] The dietary laws provide training (ἄσκησις) against desire in three ways. First, the prohibited foods are "fleshy and fat, and calculated to excite treacherous pleasure" (4.100), and therefore the dietary laws promote frugality (4.101). Second, many of the prohibited animals are cruel and carnivorous, and people eating them themselves become cruel by feelings of vengeance which are aroused by killing and eating man-eating animals (4.103–4). Third, the prohibited animals, as in Aristeas, symbolize various evil traits (and vice versa); abstinence from them teaches people to avoid these traits (4.105–18).

On the explicit level, purity and impurity do not figure strongly in these discussions: all the explanations—social, ascetic, or symbolic—would not change significantly if terminologies of impurity were replaced by prohibition. While the equation of impurity with prohibition is inherent already in the Bible, Aristeas' rejection of the ontological perspective on the impure animals further cements it. But despite the rationalizations, a certain notion of contamination is retained in these explanations, whether in the possibility of social influence or in the influence of luxurious foods. These ascetic and social explanations show that the symbolic dimension, in which the prohibition is supposed to influence moral reflection, is not itself sufficient as an explanation for these writers.

## *Animal blood*

Blood, animal and human, provided a central symbolic nexus in biblical and Second Temple cult and literature. Criminal murder was described as a spilling of blood, which required expiation and purification by spilling the blood of the murderer. Animal blood was the most potent purifier in temple cult, and its manipulation and sprinkling on the altar was a central part of most sacrifices.[168] In parallel, animal blood was prohibited for consumption; meat could only be eaten following slaughtering of the animal (as opposed to other modes of killing) and covering of the blood. The Bible (Lev 7:26–7; 17:10–14; Deut 12:23–4) explains that blood is prohibited because it "is the soul" and is preserved for expiation through sacrifice. Despite its prohibition, and as opposed to the

[165] For others with this opinion, see Josephus, *C. Ap*. 2.137; Plutarch, *Quest. Conv*. 4.4–6.2. And see Schäfer (1998), 66–81; Rosenblum (2010), 95–110.

[166] Svebakken (2010).

[167] See Svebakken (2010) for a comprehensive discussion of Philo's interpretation as part of Middle Platonic discourse on desire and abstinence. *4 Macc*. 1:33–4 also speaks of the abstinence required by the dietary laws as instance of the mastery of reason over the passions.

[168] See Ex 29:20–1; 30:10; Lev 5:9; 8:15; 14:49–52; 16:14–19; Gilders (2004).

impure animals, terms of impurity are not used towards animal blood in the Hebrew Bible.[169] However, a person who eats a carcass from which blood has not been drained is said to be impure, requiring relatively minor purification—washing and waiting till evening (Lev 17:15–16), an impurity which may be associated with the blood still present in the meat. This minor impurity may be opposed to the impurities associated with human blood—the major prohibited impurities of murder, idolatry, and sexual sin,[170] and the major tolerated impurities of menstruation and other emissions (Lev 15).

The prohibition on consuming animal blood was taken in different directions in Late Second Temple literature. *Jubilees* strongly emphasizes it (6.6–14, 7.25–33) coupling it with the shedding of human blood.[171] *Jubilees* states that the earth must be purified of the blood shed upon it through the blood of the one who shed it (7.33), applying a verse speaking of murder (Num 35:33) to the consumption of animal blood. Early rabbinic sources, however, attempt to lighten the prohibition, allowing the use of animal blood for agriculture, limiting the types of blood prohibited for consumption, and understanding the verse in Gen 9:4 as prohibiting not consumption of blood but rather eating of an animal while still alive.

## *The anthropology of defilement*

Accompanying the expansion of the relevance of impurity as both a ritual and moral concept, Second Temple texts also develop a more complex anthropology to articulate the significance of impurity and purification to the individual.

One direction is the reification of sin-related impurity as a demon or spirit. In the Hebrew Bible impurity is never linked to any personal force, perhaps because such dangerous ideas of independent natural forces were purged from the canon. These ideas do appear, however, in several extra-biblical Second Temple texts. In *1 Enoch*, the heavenly Watchers "defile themselves" with mortal women, a union which produces monstrous giants (7.1, 9.7–8, 10.20–2, 15.3–7); the defilement is probably the result of the sexual contact being a mixture of heavenly and earthly beings, and perhaps also of the relationship with

[169] As Biale (2007), 12, points out, "while animal and human blood, properly spilled, do not create ritual pollution—and, indeed, animal blood is the most powerful ritual detergent for decontaminating such pollution—blood improperly spilled is associated with the three cardinal, 'moral' sins that defile the land." See also Wright (1992), 736: "blood… [is] not prohibited on the basis of impurity." Douglas (2002[1966]), 61, 125 and Hanson (1993) wrongly say that blood was polluting according to the Bible. For criticism on this point see Maghen (2004), 72–5.

[170] The association of murder with blood is obvious, see e.g. Gen 4:10–11; Num 35:33–4; *Jub*. 6.6–14, 7.25–31; *1 En*. 7. For idolatry and blood, see Lev 17:3–6, Ez 36:17–18, Ps 106:34–8; for sexual sin, *1 En*. 15.4.

[171] For a similar juxtaposition, see Ez 33:25; a stronger link is found in *1 En*. 7. See Werman (1995); Himmelfarb (2006), 61–6; Gilders (2006).

menstrual women.[172] In *Jubilees*, the progeny of the Watchers are evil spirits, who cause diseases and incite people to sin (specifically, idolatry, bloodshed, and eating blood), and are called "impure demons" (10.1–14).[173] In these texts, the demons are independent beings, external to humans, and their impurity is a result of their evil deeds.[174]

The Dead Sea Scrolls, which include many demonic beings, present the best case for links between demons and impurity.[175] As a personification of the powers against which the Sons of Light are fighting, these demonic beings have a significant role in the Scrolls' dualist worldview. Though individual demonic beings are named, they are also frequently described as a group as "evil spirits" or "wicked spirits." At times, such spirits are said to enter people and to cause disease, which may be healed through exorcism;[176] and apotropaic prayers are found to ward off the influence of the spirits, sometimes described as "impure" (*ruaḥ ṭme'ah*, 11Q5 19.15–16, 4Q444 8). These spirits are not only external beings, but also invade the person's body, heart, or mind, influence their victim's decisions, and lead him or her to sin, though a certain degree of free will is maintained.[177] Thus the cosmic forces of evil, the inner battle of spirits, and bodily harm through disease are integrated through the demonic–spiritual realm.[178] Internal sin-impurity and its purification is at times explicitly incorporated into this spiritual worldview. For example, in the eschaton, according to the *Rule of the Community*, God will "purify [the believer] by the holy spirit from all wicked acts and sprinkle upon him the spirit of truth from all the abominations of falsehood, and from being polluted by a spirit of impurity."[179]

[172] See Wahlen (2004), 31; Loader (2007), 8–52.

[173] VanderKam (2003); Wahlen (2004), 34–7; Loader (2007), 126–45.

[174] Similarly, in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, which may, however, be of a later provenance, spirits of impurity and of fornication, the forces of Beliar, are given an inner, psychological role: A person with a divided heart or mind vacillates between loyalty to spirits of impurity/fornication and to God, while righteous people have a pure, undivided mind, rejecting the influence of impure spirits (*T. Levi* 9.9; *T. Benj.* 8.2–3; *T. Reub.* 5–6). See Wahlen (2004), 50–2; Rosen-Zvi (2006), 83–90.

[175] Milgrom (1995); Kister (1999); Wahlen (2004), 37–50.

[176] 1QapGen 20; 4Q560; 11QPsa19, 24. See Eshel (2003).

[177] For the source of sin as external or internal and the consequences for theodicy, free will, and determinism, see Brand (2013).

[178] Kister (1999). Frey (1997) argues that while in earlier sapiential texts such as the *Treatise of the Two Spirits* the different dimensions of dualism (cosmic, ethical, and psychological—e.g., the struggle of spirits in the heart) are integrated, in later sectarian texts which align the ethical border along the borders of the sect, the importance of ethical dualism is reduced and social and cosmic dualism is emphasized.

[179] IQS 4.21:…ולטהרו ברוח קודש מכול עלילות רשעה, ויז עליו רוח אמת כמי נדה מכל תועבות שקר והתגולל ברוח נדה…. See Flusser (1979), 217–24; Himmelfarb (2001), 29–34; Wahlen (2004), 45–7. The language of purification by spirits of holiness and truth is clearly derived from Ps 51 and Ez 36:25–7. The influence of these verses is seen also in 1QS 3.7–8; 1QH 8.30, 16.20; *Jub*. 1.23; *T. Benj.* 8.3; *Aramaic Levi Document* 3.13 (ed. M.E. Stone and E. Eshel [Leiden: Brill, 2004], 63). And see Levison (2002), 250–3.

There is, however, little evidence that tolerated impurities were seen as a direct demonic influence.[180]

According to several of the Dead Sea Scrolls, sin impurity is by no means only a product of external influences; it arises from inherent sinfulness and guilt of humans, linked especially to the flesh.[181] Recently, several scholars have proposed that both bodily impurities and impurity caused by sin, expressed by such terms as *ʿerva* (ערוה) and *nidda* (נדה), are seen by the Dead Sea Scrolls as aspects or results of the inherent lowliness of humans. They can therefore be purified by a holy spirit (whether in the eschaton or through the rituals of the sect) only by virtue of God's grace given to those who fulfill his commandments.[182]

For Philo of Alexandria, who followed a Platonic tripartite division of the soul together with a Stoic moral philosophy, the true objective of much of the Mosaic law is the purification of the rational part of the soul from desire, passions, and influences of the body and the senses, found in the irrational soul.[183] Such true purification allows the knowledge or sight of God.[184] While Philo describes the body as opposed to the soul in highly negative terms, he does not espouse severe asceticism but rather a moderation of the pleasures of the body.[185] When relating to purification before sacrifice (*Spec*. 1.257–60), Philo emphasizes the importance of purification of both soul and body, and that the latter is secondary to the former. The purification of the body is attained through ablutions, and that of the soul through sacrifices. This would seem to correspond to the biblical distinction between tolerated and prohibited purity, though here the focus is on the purification of the individual sinner, and not of the temple or the land.[186] At the same time, the body is itself the subject of the purification ritual, since according to Philo the mixture of water and ashes sprinkled in the ritual is supposed to remind the purified person of the humble origins of the body, and to lead to moral change.

In many instances, purification of the body is seen by Philo as an external symbol for the true meaning of the law—purification of the soul from the passions.[187] The connection is not only symbolic, however: Moses, for example,

[180] *Contra* Milgrom (1995), 66; see Baumgarten (1990).

[181] *CD* 3.12–18; 1QS 11.9–21; 1QH 5.30–33, 9.21–24, 12.28–37; 4Q418 81.2–3; 4Q512 29–38. See Kister (2009), 515–22; Himmelfarb (2001), 35–6; Frey (2002).

[182] Birenboim (2003). Holtz (2013) uses the term "constitutional purity" to designate this inherent defilement.

[183] E.g., *Cher*. 48–51; *Her*. 184–5; *Migr*. 67; *Sobr*. 62–4. See Winston (1984); Leonhardt-Balzer (2001), 256–72; Gaca (2003), 190–220; Brand (2013), 119–25. On the ascetic role of the dietary laws in purifying passions, see *Spec*. 4.100–131 with Svebakken (2009), 187–227.

[184] *QE* 2.51; *Abr*. 122.

[185] See Winston (1998); Gaca (2003), 190–220. The Therapeutae, however, are described as fasting for up to six days, *Contemp*. 34; and Moses despised "all connection with women" from the start of his prophecy, *Mos*. 2.68. For the various forms of asceticism in Philo, see Fraade (1986), 264–5 and Satlow (2008).

[186] Klawans (2000), 64–5.

[187] *Cher*. 17, 94–6; *Deus*. 7–9; *Plant*. 175–7; *Spec*. 3.208–9. And see Neusner (1973), 44–50; Kazen (2002), 219. Compare *Ps.-Phoc*. 228; *Lett. Arist*. 139, 234; *Sir*. 34.25–6.

purified "not only his soul but also his body" by separating from his wife and fasting, in order to serve as a prophet and receive the Torah.[188] For Philo, the body–soul division thus serves as shorthand for the discernment of morally significant purifications from the less significant; they are carefully distinguished but continually linked.

A similar distinction and link is made by Josephus when describing the ablutions of John the Baptist: John taught that the baptized "must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed," but rather that it serve as "a purification (ἐφ' ἁγνείᾳ) of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior (ἅτε δὴ καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς δικαιοσύνῃ προεκκεκαθαρμένης)."[189] Body and soul here serve to articulate the relationship between external action and sin; the two are ambiguously linked, but the link is not causal in either direction. The *Rule of the Community*, which as discussed conflates purification from sin and from bodily impurity to some degree, also expresses this in anthropological terms: "it is through the submission of his soul (*nafsho*, נפשו) to all the statutes of God that his flesh (*besaro*, בשרו) shall be purified, being sprinkled with waters for purification and made holy by waters for cleansing (1QS 3.9)."

Josephus emphasizes that for John a righteous life was essential for baptism, since baptism could not be used to gain pardon for past sins. John—or Josephus' report—may have been a critical response to ideas on immersion for purity advanced by contemporary groups or individuals. Josephus says that the Essenes bathe their bodies in cold water as a purification before meals, and also when touched by a foreigner or someone of a lower rank inside the group, and that his teacher Bannus performed "frequent ablutions of cold water, by day and night, for purity (πρὸς ἁγνείαν)."[190] For these individuals, regular immersion was seen as part of a general project of supererogatory purification and asceticism, and not simply as a purification for the bodily impurities described in the Torah. While the Essenes or Bannus probably did not believe immersion to simply purify from sin, rival groups may have believed their practices implied this (or simply alleged that they did), and this may explain John's insistence that baptism does not independently purify from sin. Alternatively, Josephus' insistence on the lack of efficacy of a solely external ritual may be directed at contemporary Christians, who perceived baptism in general, and John's baptism in particular, as a "pardon for sins" even as they called for repentance to accompany it (see below, p. 111).[191]

[188] *Mos*. 2.68; see Koltun-Fromm (2010), 177–9.

[189] Josephus, *A.J*. 18.117. For the relationship of this passage with Christian accounts, see below, p. 142. On this well-known passage, see Flusser (1979); Meier (1992); Taylor (1997), 88–100; Klawans (2000), 138–43; Lawrence (2006), 74–5. A minority opinion, represented by Nir (2012), doubts its authenticity.

[190] *B.J*. 2.129, 138, 150; *Vita* 11.

[191] For discussion of this latter option, see Meier (1992), 231 n. 21.

## Purity and defilement in rabbinic texts

The study of purity in Judaism in the second and third centuries, after the destruction of the temple, is to a great extent dependent on the study of the large corpus of Tannaitic texts discussing purity and on archeology.[192] Although the textual evidence is voluminous, it is almost all dedicated to technical discussions of the purity rules, and seldom discusses the Rabbis' general approach to purity, or even discloses to what extent the theoretical discussions reflect contemporary practice. Extracting such information from the texts is further complicated by questions of redaction and source criticism. The Rabbis' discussion is generally limited to the "tolerated impurities," which are basically those of the Bible. However, the biblical rules undergo great elaboration and conceptualization, leading to the creation of a highly complex purity system, composed of various degrees of impurity and methods for their transmission. As in the Bible, tolerated impurities are rarely seen as sinful; however, in rabbinic literature the maintenance of purity for the eating of *ḥullin* marks select groups from among the Rabbis, *ḥaburot*, while disregard for purity rules in general typifies *ʿamme haʾaretz*. This would imply that for the Rabbis, as for the Dead Sea Sect, maintenance of purity was a social marker differentiating various Jewish groups, though this was doubtless not its only function.[193]

From the detailed rabbinic discussions of purity, it would appear that purity was regularly required for eating and preparing food even after the destruction of the temple, and not only for the eating of tithes but occasionally also for *ḥullin*. Indeed, stories and sayings preserved in the Talmud demonstrate that practices of eating in purity, as well as use of red heifer ashes, continued up to the early fourth century.[194] A crucial question, however, on which scholarship is as yet undecided, is whether this pertains only to the customs of a small pietistic circle, or also a wider segment of the Palestinian population (not to speak of the diaspora). This question is linked to the larger debate on the degree of authority held by the Rabbis in second- and third-century Jewish society,[195] as well as to that of the social reality and status of the *ʿamme haʾaretz* and the

[192] The sixth part of the *Mishnah* and the accompanying *Tosefta*, as well as many passages throughout the rabbinic corpus, are dedicated to purity issues. Studies of purity practices and conceptions in the second and third centuries include: Neusner (1973), 72–107; Neusner (1974); Fraade (1986); Harrington (1993); Nielsen (1993); Klawans (2000), 92–133; Fonrobert (2000); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 175–238; Balberg (2014); Miller (2015); Furstenberg (2016). Archeological: Adler and Amit (2010). I thank Yair Furstenberg and Mira Balberg for allowing me to read their dissertations.

[193] See Furstenberg (2016), 209–48, who argues that according to *m. Ḥag.* 2.7, the defilement of the *ʿam haʾaretz* was categorical, and was ultimately modeled upon that of gentiles. On the relationship of *ḥabura* and the Dead Sea Sect, see Fraade (2009).

[194] Alon (1977); Nielsen (1993), 297–300; Adler and Amit (2010), 123–4, citing Shmuel Safrai, Yaacov Sussman, and Louis Ginzberg.

[195] See, e.g., Schwartz (2001), and the criticism of Miller (2007).

*ḥabura*, and their relationship to general Palestinian society. Yair Furstenberg has demonstrated that while in the earliest traditions (first century) there is an attempt by the Rabbis to maintain purity status in their day-to-day life while integrated in general society, in the later traditions (early third century) purity is assigned to a circumscribed social circle, and only to tithes and not to *ḥullin*.[196] Likewise, an analysis of traditions concerning the obligation of a man who had seminal emissions to wash before studying Torah, together with the dating of water installations near ancient synagogues, leads Yonatan Adler to the conclusion that it was still in force throughout the second century, but was no longer practiced by the middle of the third.[197]

Eating in purity according to rabbinic *halakha*, however, is only one side of the matter. As Stuart Miller has argued, even if the majority did not adhere to the stipulations of the Mishna, this does not mean that they did not maintain purity rules at all. It is very reasonable to assume that Jewish women washed after menstruation and before sexual relations, even if many may not have kept the prescribed number of days according to the Rabbis or washed in a rabbinically valid *mikveh*.[198] In fact, there is some evidence that in the second to fourth centuries, popular purity practices sometimes went beyond rabbinic stipulations. A number of Christian accounts, mostly from the diaspora, testify that Jews used to wash after sexual relations, though these are frequently in a polemical context.[199] This is corroborated by the archeological record, which shows continued use of *mikvaot* in the second and third centuries, and also from ambivalent rabbinic references to such practices.[200] There is also some evidence that a degree of purification from death impurity by immersion was observed in this period, and not only by the Rabbis.[201] Priests continued to be identified as such into the fourth century and beyond, and they may have had a significant role in synagogue worship; they would most probably have continued to take care not to be defiled by the dead and to eat tithes in purity.[202]

Thus purification from defilements was not only a memory from the temple: it continued to be a practical matter in the second and third centuries, both for the Rabbis and for other Palestinian Jews, while for the Roman diaspora there is little information. Observance of purity was in decline, however, and by the late third century related, for most Jews, principally to purification of women

[196] Furstenberg (2016). See also Goodman (2000), 178–80. [197] Adler (2008).

[198] Miller (2015). For other methods of purification current in the middle ages with possible roots in an earlier period, such as sprinkling, see Cohen (1999).

[199] Nielsen (1993), 188–229.

[200] Adler and Amit (2010); Kiperwasser (2012). [201] Adler (2009).

[202] Ir-Shai (2004), 67–106. And see the criticism of Miller (2015), 249–97, for whom priests were not the main practitioners of purity in late ancient Palestine. For the decline of the observance of death impurity among priests in the Palestinian Talmud, see *y. Ber*. 3.1 with Ta-Shma (2002); and for the earlier leniency in this regard by the Tannaim, see Noam (2009a).

from menstruation defilement, and for priests, to refraining from defilement by corpses and cemeteries, and perhaps to purification in water before eating tithes. The dual meaning of purity for the Rabbis may be seen on the background of this environment: it recalled the golden age of the temple, but was also very useful for delineating contemporary holy spaces, people, and times.[203] The maintenance of purity rules in this period shows the relevance of loci of holiness other than the temple—whether in the temple-oriented dimension of priests and tithes, in the conception of the holy Jewish nation and their holy land, or in holiness achieved through extra-temple religious ritual such as prayer or Torah-study. This holiness may be associated with the individuals or the community who perform the rituals, as well as with the place they are performed—the synagogue.

The association of defilement with sin is rare in Tannaitic literature. Leprosy especially is associated with various sins, or seen as a punishment for them; however, it is more likely that these are connected to the disease, and not to the impurity which accompanies it.[204] Sin is occasionally described as impurity, and its rescinding or removal as purification, but these do not go far beyond the biblical ideas of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:30), Ps 51 or Ez 36.[205] The Rabbis did assign ritual defilement to gentiles and to things associated with them, an idea which may or may not have been an innovation.[206] Although in principle gentiles are not included in the biblical system of defilement and purification—they are neither pure nor impure—the Rabbis considered them categorically defiled as a *zav*, one who has irregular genital emissions.[207] Similarly, idols, as well as idol-offerings, are said to be defiling, and so are all lands outside of the land of Israel, ostensibly due to the fear of unmarked bones.[208] These ideas, whose effect (and perhaps even intention) was probably to bolster the self-identity of Jews as a pure nation vis-à-vis the gentiles, demonstrate how impurity could still be used for the marking of status in a post-temple environment.

More innovative are requirements of purity not as a preparation for a religious ritual, but as practices for raising the spiritual level of the individual, i.e., as ascetic practices, whether sexual or alimentary.[209] There is a tension in

[203] See Noam (2008). For the sacrality of the synagogue as both participating in that of the temple as well as a constant reminder of the lack of the temple, see Branham (1994).

[204] Klawans (2000), 98–104.

[205] Lev 16:30 is central in *m. Yoma*'s description of the Day of Atonement ritual; see 3.8, 4.2, 6.2, and esp. 8.9; and see Klawans (2000), 116.

[206] Alon (1977), Birenboim (2006), and Noam (2010), 27–41, believe the rabbinic decrees are based on second-temple customs; Klawans (1995), Hayes (2002), 107–44, and Balberg (2014), 122–47, argue that they are an innovation.

[207] *t. Zabim* 2.1.

[208] *m. ʿAbod. Zar*. 3.6, *M. Šabb*. 9.1; *t. Zabim* 5.6–7; *t. Ohal*. 17.6–7, 18.1–2.

[209] The most pertinent tradition is Pineḥas ben Yair's saying, "Scrupulousness leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to purity, purity leads to renunciation (*perišut*), renunciation leads to holiness, holiness leads to meekness, meekness leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to piety, piety leads to the holy spirit" (*m. Soṭah* 9.15). See Fraade (1986), 269–77 and Diamond (2003).

rabbinic writings between the affirmation of marriage, procreation, and sexuality, and the conception that sexuality is at times detrimental to spiritual development. The dominant resolution of this tension is to support moderate and ordered sexuality as the ideal for the sage, but other opinions, which support the curtailment of sexuality for a time, are also voiced.[210] A similar tension is reflected in traditions on the nazirite, in which the Rabbis dispute whether abstinence produces holiness or rather requires expiation.[211]

Mira Balberg recently analyzed the purity rules of the Mishnah as a discourse of subjectivity, reflecting the construction of the individual through constant self-examination, a conscious management of the self in an impure world.[212] The focus of the purity laws shifts from the various sources of defilement to the circles of impurity they create in the world, following which the only solution is to be attentive at all times to the maintenance of the subject's own purity. In the next step, the self-conscious act of maintaining attention becomes the center of the purity project, while the sources of impurity themselves are marginalized. This discourse, she argues, is akin to the Greco-Roman concept of *σωφροσύνη*, denoting self-control, self-knowledge and moderation, which is central in the asceticism discourse of the Roman Empire.[213]

## Summary

What is most striking about the role of purity in ancient Judaism is its diversity: purity language and conceptions were used to denote a wide, and not totally compatible, spectrum of meaning, from the moral to the ritual, and from the communal to the individual. This diversity—its relevance for many domains of religious life—is what allowed it to become such a potent symbol, through the transfer of values from one domain to the other. Accordingly, both battle and truce models of impurity came into play (see above, p. 11). In some cases, purity vs. defilement was part of the general opposition between good and evil, expressed through various dimensions of theology, law, and anthropology. In this case there can be no neutral middle ground between pure and impure: the impure/evil/sinful must be eradicated. In other cases, the opposition of purity vs. defilement is much less charged—both are normal expressions of human life.

Some purity rituals were more apt for expressing moral attitudes than others. Purity as a ritual reflection of moral conceptions was especially prominent when purity became aligned with group-borders and defilement signified the crossing of these borders. In the first centuries CE, purity functioned as a tool

[210] Boyarin (1993), 134–66; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 214–38.
[211] Diamond (2003), 121–32.
[212] Balberg (2014), 148–79.
[213] Balberg (2014), 151–71.

for creating new sites for holiness, and especially for differentiating different groups in Jewish society and for articulating the difference between Jews and non-Jews. This was true also before the destruction of the temple; but the lack of a temple meant that holiness would necessarily be situated in new ways. At these instances, sin could be reified as the outsider, and the defilement of sin as the contact with the other. Another channel for reification of sin as defilement passed through the demonic, cast in many texts as the source for evil. However, demonic defilement is never clearly defined, and rarely assimilated to the more mundane bodily defilements.

Purity practices in Palestinian Jewish society of the first century BCE to the first century CE certainly went far beyond those practiced in contemporary Greek cities. This can be seen especially in the extensive elaboration of purity laws found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and early rabbinic texts: while the core principles of the defilement of death and sex are similar to those of the Greek sacred laws, the intricate methods of contagion and purification and the various effects of defilement on food are not found elsewhere. Furthermore, some of the new sources of defilement identified during the Second Temple period and later—of gentiles and their food, of idolatry, and of territory outside Palestine—are certainly more a defensive measure against Greco-Roman culture than an adoption of it, and there are no significant parallels to such defilements in Greco-Roman cults.

And yet, the individualization and corresponding de-sacralization of purity issues in Judaism of this period, expanding requirements of purity beyond the traditional sacred spaces and times and focusing on the human body itself, can be linked to contemporary Greco-Roman ideas. This is, unsurprisingly, more easily seen in Greek authors (i.e., Philo and Josephus), but is not confined to them. Philo's interpretation of purification as pertaining to the advancement of the person, the depiction of sexual sin as defilement, and the promotion of Jewish ascetics is clearly influenced by Platonic, Stoic, and Pythagorean models, and is all quite in line with contemporary Greco-Roman literary custom. The Dead Sea Sect, with its displacement of sacrality from temple to the holy community and self and the corresponding expansion of purity concerns, can also be seen along this trajectory, though here biblical language and concepts permeate the literature to a much greater extent. In the evocative literature of the sect, the body and wrongdoing are blended into a unified image of defilement as part of a grand dualist scheme. Finally, in the rabbinic period, operating in a post-temple era, most of the purity laws were transformed from practical reality to discourse alone, an object for study and discussion. Those which remained in practice were reoriented from the temple and its sacrifices to the realm of the individual and the community.

# Part II

# Breaking with the Past

# 3

# Early Christian Attitudes Towards Dietary Impurity

Food was the main focus for explicit discussions of purity among Christians in the first three centuries CE. This focus reflects the central preoccupation of early Christian writers in constructing their communities in relation and in opposition to Judaism. Dietary laws were an important aspect of Jewish representation and self-identification in the ancient world. In the Roman Empire, rigorous dietary laws similar to the laws of Leviticus were quite rare, and Christians of the first centuries had to decide to what extent they saw themselves obligated to such laws. At the same time, early Christians practiced additional dietary laws, not all directly related to the Levitical laws.

## DIETARY PURITY IN FIRST-CENTURY TEXTS

The many passages in Paul's letters and the Gospel accounts discussing dietary purity attest to the importance of food as a focus for purity issues in earliest Christianity. These passages had a decisive impact on subsequent discussions.[1] In first-century texts, food defilement is always discussed in a conflictual setting, in which a certain group takes defilement more seriously than others. The immediate objective of the author in these passages is to provide guidance on the identity of "true" defilement as opposed to "false" defilement as understood by the rival groups. This guidance focuses on the relationship of defilement with sin and on the anthropology of defilement, i.e., which aspects of the person are involved in it. These dimensions of the earliest discussions of food defilement were to become the standard talking points in the following centuries, not only for issues of food defilement, but for impurity discourse as a whole.

[1] For a comprehensive bibliography on purity in the Gospels, see Meier (2009), 415–26.

## Dietary restrictions and the biblical dietary laws

### *Paul*

The earliest documents from the communities of Jesus' followers are the Pauline epistles. Paul emphasizes the social meanings of eating and recognizes the need to respect the impurity beliefs of other community members, even if they are not objectively grounded. For Paul and his community, the contentious dietary issues are food offered to idols (1 Cor 8–10), Jews eating with gentiles (Gal 2), and eating meat and drinking wine (Rom 14). The biblical dietary laws are not explicitly mentioned, though they may have been the background for the abstinence described in Romans. In Romans 14, purity language is used emphatically; in 1 Corinthians 9–11, there is only a single occurrence of a purity term regarding food.

Romans 14 argues for the relativization and individualization of defilement. Paul speaks of the eating customs of different groups in the community: "Some believe in eating anything, while the delicate eat only vegetables" (v. 2). Later in the chapter, it is mentioned that some "eat meat and drink wine" while others do not (v. 21). Various proposals have been offered for understanding the abstinence of "the delicate" in Romans 14. Vegetarianism was a central plank of the Neopythagorean purity doctrine and was a common doctrine in contemporary philosophical circles (see p. 35). In parallel, total abstinence from meat provided a simple way to adhere to the Jewish dietary laws in a gentile environment,[2] and is portrayed in some Jewish texts as an act of piety and mourning for the destruction of the temple, or mourning for sin.[3] Moreover, as meat and wine were associated with idolatry, abstinence expressed its total rejection.[4] There was thus ample background for vegetarianism to spread in early Christian communities. Paul's lack of specificity concerning the dietary issues at hand is itself telling; even if the abstention is based on Jewish dietary concerns, the question of the precise *halakhic* categories is less important than the meaning of pure/impure categorization for the community. For Paul and his readers, a person abstaining from certain foods will mark them as pure, and vice versa; impurity is synonymous with prohibition.

Each group, Paul says, should adhere to its beliefs; the strong (Paul among them) should not judge the delicate, even if the latter are in the wrong:

[2] Probable examples are Dan 1, Judith, 12:1–4, Josephus *Vita* 4.

[3] For the temple: *m. Taʿanit* 4.6; *b. Baba Batra* 60b = *t. Sotah* 15.11–12; for sin: *T. Reub*. 1.10, *T. Jud*. 15.4. For a summary of evidence and scholarship, see Toney (2008), 56–61.

[4] The Jewish connection is strengthened by Paul's use of *koinon* for impurity; see below, n. 6. See Barclay (1996); and see McGowan (1999a), 33–88 for Jewish and Greco-Roman meat and wine abstentions in antiquity, 226–31 on Romans. Reasoner (1999), 137, identifies in the abstinence of the weak/delicate "a composite of Jewish and pagan values current in first-century Rome."

> (14:13) Let us therefore no longer pass judgment (κρίνωμεν) on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. (14) I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is impure in itself; but it is impure for anyone who thinks it impure (οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι' ἑαυτοῦ· εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκείνῳ κοινόν)…(20)…Everything is indeed pure (πάντα μὲν καθαρά), but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat…(23) But those who have doubts (διακρινόμενος) are condemned (κατακέκριται) if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

The reiteration that "nothing is impure of itself" and that "everything is pure" forcefully puts forward Paul's position on the impurity of food. With such statements, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul believed that food impurity did not have a firm ontological basis, and furthermore that he thought that this stance is commensurate or even based on a tradition from Jesus.[5] However, it is impossible to know precisely which food impurity he was talking about. The lack of specificity is aggravated by Paul's use of the term κοινόν to refer to impure foods. This term, commonly used in the NT to denote defilement, is found with this meaning only in Jewish Greek. Scholars argue that the term refers to foods of doubtful or derived, rather than intrinsic, impurity.[6] In any case, it does not clearly denote animals prohibited in Leviticus.

Despite the categorical anti-impurity statement, Paul recognizes the need for abstinence in certain cases, seemingly not only because of the care and respect that must be taken towards others who abstain in order to maintain a unified community and out of brotherly love, but also because eating impure food is truly sinful for those who "have doubts." This points to a notion of subjective dietary impurity based on a person's internal integrity and faith; though subjective, however, this perception of impurity must be respected by the community as a whole. Daniel Schwartz has recently argued that this relativist conception of impurity accords with Paul's general stance on the Law, namely, that it is still in force for those who do not have the saving knowledge of the believers, and that such people sin if they do not abide by it.[7]

[5] A tradition which may be reflected also in Mark 7:15, see below, pp. 64–6.

[6] The earliest attestation for this meaning is *1 Maccabees* 1.47, referring to animals that Antiochus IV forces the Jews to sacrifice (together with swine); the parallel to Is 65:4 indicates that at least here, *koinon* translates פגולים, itself an ill-defined term. Wahlen (2005) argues that it denotes a status of doubtful purity; House (1983), believes that in the NT it denotes something which was defiled by something else, but is not essentially impure. See further Hauck (1964). Benovitz (1996), 21–2 argues that *m. Ned.* 1.3: "לא כשר, ולא דכי [טהור], ושמא, נותר ופיגול [. . . non-kosher, impure, defiled, remnant sacrificial meat, and refuse]" are all common Hebrew translations of *koinon*, demonstrating the broad field of this term by this period.

[7] Schwartz (2011); Furstenberg (2011) has a similar reading of 14:14, but sees the relativist conception as going back to Jesus, with Paul shifting to a more absolutist notion in 14:20. I thank Yair Furstenberg for allowing me to read the text of this unpublished paper.

## *Gospels*

The most influential text on early Christian discussions of impurity was Mark 7:1–23 and its parallel, Matthew 15:1–20 (as well as the non-canonical *Gospel of Thomas* 14). According to Mark's report, Jesus' disciples were criticized by the Pharisees for eating with hands that are unwashed and therefore defiled (κοιναῖς), against "the traditions of the elders." Before eating, Mark explains in an aside, "the Pharisees and all the Jews" wash their hands, and they also wash any food from the market and their utensils. Jesus accuses them of hypocrisy for practicing such human traditions while abandoning the commandments of God. He then teaches a parable to the crowd: "there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out of the person are what defile the person (7:15)."[8] To the disciples he explains,

> (18) "Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, (19) since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" Thus he declared all foods pure. (20) And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. (21) For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery…"[9]

The Matthean version is shorter, and less radical: "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles" (15:11); significantly, the statement in 19b, "thus he declared all foods pure," indicating a wide-ranging dismantling of Jewish food purity, is missing in Matthew. Furthermore, Matthew closes the unit with the saying that sins defile a person, but "to eat with unwashed hands does not defile," focusing the discussion solely on the question of hand washing. The majority view is that the Marcan tradition is earlier than Matthew, and that Matthew reworked the Marcan tradition to better speak to his Jewish audience.[10]

Despite the primacy of the Marcan version, many scholars have argued that 7:19b must have been added later than the rest of the passage.[11] Without this

[8] *οὐδέν ἐστιν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν ὃ δύναται κοινῶσαι αὐτόν· ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενά ἐστιν τὰ κοινοῦντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον.*

[9] *οὐ νοεῖτε ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἔξωθεν εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς τὸν ἄνθρωπον οὐ δύναται αὐτὸν κοινῶσαι, ὅτι οὐκ εἰσπορεύεται αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν, καὶ εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκπορεύεται; καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα. ἔλεγεν δὲ ὅτι Τὸ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκεῖνο κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον· ἔσωθεν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς καρδίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοὶ ἐκπορεύονται, πορνεῖαι, κλοπαί, φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι…*

[10] See, e.g., Booth (1986), 49–50; Kazen (2010), 126–7; Meier (2009), 388–91. Dissenters are Sigal (1983) and Dunn (1990), 43–4, who believes Matthew (and the close parallel, *Gos. Thom.* 14) relies here on an earlier oral tradition, earlier than or contemporary with that reflected by Mark, perhaps part of Q.

[11] Räisänen (1982) and Meier (2009), 384–97 argue that Jesus' parable as reported by Mark is not authentic. Many other scholars believe 15, and perhaps 18–21, are authentic; see Booth (1986), 46–53; Klawans (2000), 146–7; Collins (2007), 353. Chilton (2003) proposes a reconstruction of four stages of editing of the text, from Jesus' original logion to the final Marcan redaction, reflecting increasingly hostile attitudes towards traditional purity perceptions.

addition, Jesus' sayings in verses 15 and 18–21 are not so radical: read in the context of the hand-washing disputation, they only relate to food defiled by impure hands (an innovation no earlier than the first century BCE) and not to the biblical dietary laws.[12] Even read as a separate unit, the things coming "from outside" would probably refer, in an early first-century context, to food defiled by corpse defilement or genital emissions, and not to food categorically prohibited by the Torah.[13] Scholars have also pointed out that the opposition between the things "coming from outside" and "from inside" may not be absolute but relative, i.e., that the things coming from outside are not completely non-defiling, but only less significantly defiling than those from inside; this would be a commonplace in first-century Judaism.[14] Furthermore, while the explanation to the disciples identifies the things coming in as food and those going out as evil intentions, this is not explicit in the parable itself. Some have argued that the parable in fact opposes two kinds of *ritual* defilements: the biblical-tolerated impurities coming from within, specifically genital emissions; and food which has been defiled, which indeed does not defile the person eating it according to the Bible.[15] This opposition is then used by Jesus to make the point that moral actions are more important than ritual, but without a rejection of any biblical defilement laws and certainly not of dietary laws.

Mark, however, was acting in the context of a partly gentile church, in which the status of the biblical dietary laws themselves was in dispute, following the Pauline challenge of the relevance of the Mosaic Law for gentiles and the subjectivization of impurity (Rom 14).[16] He therefore portrays Jesus as purifying "all foods." This did not necessarily have to mean the cancellation of the biblical dietary rules, but it is difficult to see why non-Jewish readers would not understand it in this way. Certainly, in the second and third centuries readers always understood Mark to mean the biblically prohibited animals.[17] At their final stage of redaction, the sayings in their context oppose the irrelevance of Jewish washing rituals and dietary laws to the significance of the impurity of evil thoughts and actions. Thus the concept of impurity is not discarded; rather,

[12] See the readings of Booth (1986), 65–74; Kazen (2002), 63–7, 86–8, 229; Furstenberg (2008).

[13] Kister (2001); Furstenberg (2008).

[14] Above, pp. 52–3ff. See Booth (1986), 69–71; Dunn (1990), 51; Klawans (2000), 147; Kazen (2002), 65–6, 88; Collins (2007), 354–5.

[15] Booth (1986), 206–13; Kister (2001), 150–3; Furstenberg (2008).

[16] See especially the parallel between Rom 14:20 and Mark 7:19. For possible Pauline influences on the final Marcan narrative, see Chilton (2003); Meier (2009), 394–7; Scornaienchi (2014).

[17] For possible alternative readings which do not see 7:19b as relating to the dietary laws, see Tomson (1999), 206; Kazen (2002), 220; Wahlen (2004), 73–9; Crossley (2009). In my opinion, the ungrammaticality of 7:19b is a good indication for a radical reading, which would not easily be integrated into the earlier argument. If indeed Mark is referring here to the dietary laws, this can be understood in two ways, both radical: either that Jesus declared that no foods have ever been impure (denying that the OT was ever to be practiced), or that they were impure in the past, but he is now purifying them (providing him with the power to purify what is naturally impure). See Marcus (2000), 457, who opts for the second option.

Mark's Jesus strictly and explicitly separates the impurity of food from sin impurity in an unprecedented fashion, rejects one and upholds the other. By concluding the hand-washing narrative with the statement "thus he declared all foods pure," Mark merges hand-washing and biblical dietary laws into one undifferentiated principle of Jewish ritual purity, a critical move for future discussions. The dietary laws are described as non-essential and "external" as opposed to the significance and "internality" of moral precepts; the degree of significance is expressed as a degree of defilement.

Outside vs. inside the body is the reigning image through which Mark's Jesus expresses his views on purity.[18] Even though food is eaten and internalized, it is still considered external since it is then evicted from the body, and especially does not enter the heart; only things coming from the heart—actions born from intentions (διαλογισμοί)—are really significant and therefore defiling. The list of evil things which come from within and defile is diverse. It includes the traditional biblical sources of sin defilement (fornication, murder, adultery, though not idolatry); other inter-personal sins (theft, deceit, envy, slander), some of which are known from the Dead Sea Scrolls as sources of sin impurity; personal qualities (avarice, pride, folly); and a general term, wickedness.[19] The defilement accompanying them is less the result of the evil action than of its source in the person's διαλογισμοί. In parallel, it is the person who is defiled, and not—as in the Hebrew Bible—the land or the temple. As in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature, the heart represents the true essence of the person, especially that of intentionality and moral responsibility.[20] Thus Mark identifies and ties together two features of moral purity: interiority and intention.

Mark's strict opposition of inner and outer, rejecting a defilement associated with food, is generally in line with the major Pauline discussions of food purity, Rom 14 and 1 Cor 9–11. Likewise, Mark's focus on the individual's thoughts as the basis for impurity is similar to the Pauline emphasis. However, in Paul food remains the focus of impurity, even if this impurity is subjective and personal. For Mark, the impurity of food is opposed to that of thought and action.

## *Acts*

The *Acts of the Apostles* is evidence that ambivalence about the force of the dietary laws still reigned in the late first century, at least in some circles. In a vision (Acts 10:9–16), Peter sees a sheet with "all kinds of four-footed creatures

[18] See also Matt 23:25–6 paralleling Luke 11:37–41, with Uro (2000) and Kazen (2002), 222–31.

[19] Klawans (2000), 146–50; Kazen (2002), 214–19 speaks of Jesus as developing and radicalizing the "moral trajectory" found in late Second Temple Judaism concerning purity.

[20] Raasch (1966), 11–21; Collins (2007), 356–7. And see Ps 24:3, 51:12; Jer 4:14, Prov 6:18, and Matt 5:8 on purity of heart, with Bauer and Felber (1988); Betz (1995), 134–7.

and reptiles and birds of the air" being lowered from heaven to earth, and is told "kill and eat." When he objects that he "has never eaten anything defiled or impure (*πᾶν κοινὸν καὶ ἀκάθαρτον*)," he is told "What God has purified (*ἐκαθάρισεν*), you must not call defiled." Later in the narrative, the vision is explained as allowing association with believing gentiles (v. 28). While this is the only unequivocal reference in the NT to the biblical dietary laws, the animals are only a metaphor for gentiles, who are the focus of the narrative: it is nowhere said that the animals themselves should in fact (and not in a dream) be eaten.[21] Nevertheless, the reference to purification by God in the past would appear to refer to a known occasion which is not part of the vision, and this can be read as being based on Mark 7:19, where Jesus does precisely this.[22] The vision and its interpretation convey the idea that impurity is a homogenous and general concept, which can be applied to food and people in much the same way.[23] Furthermore, it demonstrates the strong connection for the first-century communities between food and community boundaries; food was the most direct way to express community unity.

### *Pseudo- and Deutero-Pauline letters*

In Colossians, a letter usually attributed to a follower of Paul from the 70s or 80s, Paul opposes a party to whom he ascribes Jewish customs, an ascetic attitude, worship of angels, and the observance of traditions coming from humans, not from God (2:8–23). Such observances, he says, are irrelevant after Christ's triumph over the rulers of the world. Specifically, he says,

> (2:16) Do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink (*κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει ἢ ἐν πόσει*) or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. (17) These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ… (20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations (*δογματίζεσθε*), (21) "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch" (*Μὴ ἅψῃ*

[21] This continues the Jewish-Hellenistic tradition of reading the dietary laws as referring to the prohibition of association with sinful people; see above, pp. 48–9. Wahlen (2005) understands the commandment to "kill and eat" as referring not to the impure animals, but rather to animals which are of questionable purity (*koinos*)—and thus parallel with the status of God-fearers, in the grey area between Jew and gentile. While the suggestion is intriguing, the evidence for *koinos* having this meaning is weak: see Oliver (2013), 423. And see above, n. 6.

[22] Alternatively, Mark 7:19b may be an insertion based on Acts' witness. If Acts is referring here to a general purification of all animals, i.e., an abrogation of the dietary laws, the parallel with the "purification" of the gentiles is not precise: only believing gentiles who have been actively purified by baptism and the holy spirit are seen as pure; see Acts 15:7–11, but compare 10:28, in which "no human" should be called impure.

[23] *Contra* Furstenberg (2016), 219–21, for whom the interpretation of the vision totally supplants its original focus on animals, and who therefore concludes that "Peter believes that the descriptions used for the categorization of animals and foods cannot be used for distancing from people."

μηδὲ γεύσῃ μηδὲ θίγῃς)? (22) All these regulations refer to things that perish (φθορὰν) with use; they are simply human commands and teachings.

Of course, this description of the shadowy rivals does not necessarily mean that they actually practiced such regulations, or indeed that such a group even existed; rather, the writer uses the stereotyping of opponents to strengthen the identity of his group and to position the religious practice of his group as beyond such regulations. Though purity is not mentioned in this pericope, the "matters of food and drink" in conjunction with the sabbaths and festivals would suggest that some Jewish dietary laws are in mind; however, as in Romans 14, there are no clearer indications of what these dietary regulations may have been.[24] Since the party is described as ascetic, promoting "severe treatment of the body" (v.23), it is probable that the alimentary abstentions had an ascetic background. Verse 21, which again refers to unknown dietary abstentions, does not make the picture much clearer, despite the added hint of "do not touch," which brings to mind purity restrictions similar to those of the Hebrew Bible. The purity direction is made stronger in verse 22, with an echo of Mark 7:19 and a reference to Mark 7:7–8 (purity is a human command). Here too, over-regard for "external" purity of food is linked with lack of suitable authority. Although the details are opaque, the overall message is clear. Such regulations are only relevant for those who still live in this world, unaware of the change which Christ wrought; for believers in Christ, adherence to them is harmful.

## Food offered to idols

### *Paul*

In 1 Corinthians 8–10, Paul contends with a more specific question of eating food which was offered to idols.[25] He envisions a number of situations in which this might occur: in a temple (8:10),[26] by buying meat of doubtful origin (10:25), or by eating food of doubtful origin in a non-believer's house (10:27). In the first case the food should not be eaten, while in the two other cases it may, as long as it is not known that it was indeed offered to idols; the attempt to understand this apparent discrepancy has been the basis of much scholarship. Paul explains the prohibition in the first case as follows:

[24] See Dunn (1996), 171–5, 190–94; MacDonald (2008), 109, 116–26.

[25] The scholarship on 1 Cor 8–10 is considerable; besides the commentaries there are a large number of monographs from the past three decades. I found most helpful the commentaries of Fee (1987), 357–491 and Fitzmyer (2008), 330–404 and the studies of Tomson (1990), 189–221, Cheung (1999), and Still (2002). For a recent survey of scholarship see Fotopoulos (2003), 1–37.

[26] The precise situation envisioned here is much debated: to what extent was eating in a temple linked to sacrifice to the gods? For a thorough investigation, see Fotopoulos (2003), 49–178.

> (8:7)…Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their consciousness, being delicate, is defiled (ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενὴς οὖσα μολύνεται)…(10) For if others see you, who possess knowledge (γνῶσιν), eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their consciousness is delicate (ἀσθενοῦς), be encouraged (οἰκοδομηθήσεται) to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols?[27]

Many have read this as indicating that Paul does not believe that there is an essential problem with food offered to idols, and that its prohibition is only a matter of maintaining peace in the community. However, Peter Tomson and Alex Cheung have argued according to Jewish parallels and in light of the forceful anti-idolatry language in 10:1–23 that Paul's basic stance is that idol food should never be eaten,[28] but that idolatrous intention is required in order to render the food prohibited; in doubtful cases in which idolatrous intention is not clear, there is no obligation to investigate further if such intention was indeed present. The default situation, until known otherwise, is that the food was not used for idolatry, since "the earth and its fullness are the Lord's" (10:26). According to such a reading, the consciousness of the delicate is defiled (συνείδησις αὐτῶν…μολύνεται) when they in fact eat such food, since they are not strong in their new belief, and therefore still eat with intention towards idolatry, unprotected by true knowledge.[29]

A third option is to continue the line of Romans 14: Paul does not believe in essential, objective dietary impurity, but nevertheless thinks that such impurity exists subjectively for those who believe in it, and that the opinions and situation of these people should be respected by the other members. Paul interiorizes the defilement and relativizes it: some people are defiled but not others, according to their prior beliefs and character. It is not simply the food itself which defiles, but its interaction with the suitable consciousness which accepts it as idolatrous. Though this explanation has the advantage of cohering with Romans, it is somewhat at odds with Paul's categorical and "objective" description of the consumers of food offered to idols as partners (κοινωνούς) with demons and partaking (μετέχειν) of their table, which prevents them from taking part in the Lord's table (10:21–3).[30]

[27] Translation NRSV, with amendments following Tomson (1990), 195–7.

[28] Alternatively, Still (2002) reads Paul as saying that *in principle* food offered to idols is allowed, but that it should never be eaten in a temple setting due to the dangers to other community members.

[29] See Tomson (1990), 215–16; Cheung (1999), 130–4. And see Martin (1995), 179–89, who emphasizes the prophylactic function of *gnosis* against the pollution of demons. For Martin, pollution is the main concern of Paul with food offered to idols, even though 8:7 is the only instance of purity language in these chapters.

[30] For the meaning of this partnership, see Fitzmyer (2008), 393–4. For the earlier history of the idea of the pagan gods as evil demons, see Martin (2010).

Impurity does not appear to have been at the core of the dispute in Corinth, and this is signaled by the single mention of "defilement" in these chapters, itself rather unclear. "Defilement of consciousness" (8:7) parallels "wounding of consciousness" (v. 12); when community members eat food offered to idols, the delicate are harmed by being led to idolatry.[31] Defilement here is not used in a precise fashion. Rather, it implies that the eater of such food, and more specifically the eater's higher faculties, both sin and are harmed by eating.

The Pauline discussions of food impurity, mirroring actual contentions in the early Christian communities, pertain to idolatry and its influences and to abstention from meat and wine and other alimentary asceticisms, which may have been based on Jewish dietary laws. This reflects a shift in the focus of food symbolism from issues current in Palestinian late Second Temple period society of the washing of hands and contagious impurity to those of the diaspora communities, where questions of idolatry and alimentary asceticism were apparently paramount. It is probable that some members of these communities maintained the biblical dietary laws as well, though this is nowhere explicitly mentioned.

Although the impurity of idolatry has a strong presence in Jewish literature since the Bible, its relevance as a ritual concept pertaining to food is never clear, even in late Second Temple Judaism; the subjective dimension of idolatry may have made it difficult to render in rigid ritual rules (see above, p. 56). Paul is no different in this regard. He refers to food offered to idols in practice as defiling, but far from automatically: the defilement is subject to the character of the persons influenced by it, their faith or their consciousness. Impurity does not cease to exist—but ideally, since it arises from sin, in a strongly believing community it would not be able to gain a foothold in the minds of the believers.

### *Acts*

The role of food as defining the identity of the new community comes to the fore most clearly in the "Apostles' Decree" cited in Acts 15:20, 29, and 21:25, in which the Jerusalem church agreed that ritual demands from gentiles should be limited to abstinence from "food offered to idols/the pollution of idols (εἰδωλοθύτων (15:29, 21:25)/ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων (15:20)), from sexual immorality (πορνείας), from the meat of strangled animals (πνικτοῦ) and from blood."[32] The Decree's demands are described as the most "essential"

[31] Fitzmyer (2008), 345. As Cheung (1999), 131 and Martin (1995), 181–2 point out, the parallels between verses 7, 10, and 12 show that the person's consciousness is not differentiated from the person; there is no essential difference between a delicate consciousness and a delicate person.

[32] These verses raise many textual problems, and they appear as cited in most, but not all, of the manuscripts, with the Western tradition lacking πνικτοῦ. This omission leads to a less food-related reading, with "blood" more easily understood as bloodshed, and "the pollution of idols" as

(ἐπάναγκες, 15:28) laws, clearly of Jewish provenance, which gentiles must perform; as such, scholars see them as "halakha for gentiles"[33] or as showing gentiles' affiliation to the Jewish *ethnos* through Jewish identity markers.[34]

The significance of impurity in this case depends on how ἀλισγημάτων is read; does it relate only to idols (making impurity simply a synonym for food offered to them), or to all four items, and thus the governing concept of the decree?[35] All four items are found as impure in Second Temple Jewish literature. Although the impurity of animal blood and of strangled animals is in a different class from the idols and *porneia*, there are precedents for linking them.[36] A wider reading of ἀλισγημάτων is important for Jürgen Wehnert's otherwise compelling thesis that the four items of the decree are all things which the Bible sees as defiling to gentiles as well as Jews (Lev 17–18), and were therefore the most significant obstacles before fellowship of Jews and gentiles in the early church.[37] However, whether from the decree itself or from its context there is no reason to think that table fellowship between gentiles and Jews is the issue here, or that a gentile eating one of the prohibited foods would be seen as defiling to Jews. The issue is rather, as Markus Bockmuehl explains, "what gentiles must do to be saved."[38] Furthermore, the fact that one of the reports (15:29) lacks ἀλισγημάτων altogether would argue against the centrality of impurity here. The ambiguity of the text on the matter remains. In any case, later readers could easily see this text as ascribing impurity to all the items.

The impurity of idols and of food offered to them is clearly more absolute in Acts than in Paul. While Romans and 1 Corinthians emphasize intention, here there are no qualifications. Furthermore, the prohibition on blood and

idol worship; it is reasonable to see this as an emendation to "de-ritualize" the decree (see the arguments in Oliver [2013], 369; *contra*, e.g., Wedderburn [1993]). Much has been written on problems of provenance, authorship, and editing of the decree, as well as concerning its role in disputations in the early church, e.g., its relationship with the dispute in Gal 2 between Paul and James. A comprehensive recent treatment is Wehnert (1997). Discussions of the textual problems and further bibliography are found in Wedderburn (1993); Wehnert (1997), 22–9.

[33] Wehnert (1997), 72–3; Bockmuehl (2000), 164–7.

[34] Deines (2007), 375–8. For the background of the items of the decree in Lev 17–18 and in the commandments given to Noah as refracted in Second Temple literature, see Barrett (1994), 733–5; Bockmuehl (2000), 150–73; Taylor (2001); Oliver (2013), 370–98.

[35] Wehnert (1997), 69 and Deines (2007), 379–81 hold the latter position; Wedderburn (1993) holds the former. Alternatively, ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων may be the heading, which is then detailed: *porneia*, blood, strangled animals. And compare the decree as found in the Pseudo-Clementine literature, *Hom*. 7.4, 7.8, 8.23, where impurity is only linked to idols or demons and not to the other items; while in *Hom*. 8.19 (Rehm I.129) partaking of the table of demons, shedding blood, and eating strangled animals are all seen as part of idol-worship, with the list rounded off by "and anything else that is impure." And see Klijn (1968).

[36] See above, p. 51, nn. 173, 174.

[37] Wehnert (1997), 245–61; and see the criticism of Bockmuehl (1999), 266–7. Certainly Wehnert's reference to the decree as comprising the Torah's "zentrale reinheitsgesetzliche" (p. 72) is unwarranted.

[38] Bockmuehl (2000), 164; Deines (2007), 355–6, *contra* Fitzmyer (1998), 557; Oliver (2013), 395–8.

strangled animals is of a different nature than that of food offered to idols: blood remains blood, no matter what you think about it. The sin is therefore in the eating itself, not in a prior action which then may affect the food. Even without explicit definition as impurity, the prohibition on blood and strangled animals—which remained in force for centuries—is significant as it is a dietary law plain and simple, very similar to, and indeed drawing upon, Jewish dietary laws. In the ensuing centuries, Paul was read on the basis of Acts, so that blood and food offered to idols were considered categorically impure, in practice if not in theory. Paul's radical subjectivization of impurity was implemented on the Jewish dietary laws prohibiting certain animals, rather than on the prohibitions of Acts, thus putting Paul's writing in line with the common practice of the Christian communities.

## CHRISTIAN DIETARY OBSERVANCES IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES

Food continued to be a central issue for Christians of the second century, and the attitude towards dietary restrictions had an important role in the construction of Christian identity as separate from Judaism and paganism, as well as in the formation of the various Christian groups. The main issues were already found *in nuce* in the first century: the forbidden animals of the Jewish dietary laws, food offered to idols, blood and strangled animals, and meat and wine in general. While the Jewish dietary laws were almost completely rescinded, the other abstinences were widely practiced in the second- and third-century communities.

### Food offered to idols

#### *Food offered to idols as an identity marker*

The *Didache*, a text not later than the mid-second century, clearly prohibits food offered to idols:[39]

> And concerning food, bear what you can; but especially abstain from food sacrificed to idols (εἰδωλοθύτου); for this is a ministry to dead gods (λατρεία … θεῶν νεκρῶν).[40]

[39] Böckenhoff (1903) is still the most comprehensive study for post-first-century texts; for writers of the second and third centuries, see Cheung (1999), 210–77.

[40] 6.3 (Ehrman 426–7).

There are various opinions as to the original context of this sentence: some argue that it is part of the Jewish stratum of the *Didache* ("the Two Ways"), while others claim it is a Jewish-Christian "appendix" to the Jewish stratum, or from the pen of the final editor of the *Didache*.[41] In any case it appears that by the mid-second century this sentence was already in existence, calling for specific abstinence from food offered to idols as a minimum requirement. Most scholars see the call to "bear what you can" as relating to the Jewish dietary laws, perhaps functioning as a more stringent version of the Apostles' Decree, but some read it as referring to general abstinence (for example from meat).[42] Thus the concern about food offered to idols is seen in the context of food restrictions, not of idolatry.

The reason given for the prohibition is too laconic to allow any definitive interpretation. It would appear the act of eating of the offerings is itself considered to be a λατρεία—it is not that the food was defiled by the act of offering and should therefore not be eaten, rather that eating it is considered an act of worship, presumably even when performed outside temple precincts. No defilement is spoken of, though the phrase "dead gods" brings to mind the defilement of the dead, and certainly gives such sacrifices a highly negative connotation.[43] The continuing prohibition of food offered to idols for Christians is found in many texts of the second to the fourth century.[44]

A number of second-century texts testify to the importance of abstaining from food offered to idols as a Christian identity marker.[45] The early second-century *Apology of Aristides* declares (15), as part of a list of Christian virtues opposed to Jewish and especially pagan mores, that "of the food which is sacrificed to idols they do not eat, for they are pure (ܕܢܟܠܘܢ ܡܢ ܕܒܝܫ ܕܩܪܒ̈ܝܢ ܠܨܠܡ̈ܐ ܠܐ ܡܟܠ̈ܝܢ ܗܝ ܕܙܟ̈ܝ ܗܢ)." Aristides is also the first to refer explicitly to the Jewish dietary laws as a question of "purity of foods,"[46] and abstinence from food sacrificed to idols is set up as the superior Christian food purity, aligned with their sexual purity.[47] Aristides'

[41] Flusser (1987); Draper (2003).

[42] See Flusser (1987); Tomson (1990), 180; Cheung (1999), 211–12; Draper (2003), esp. 112–14.

[43] The phrase "dead gods" is probably based on LXX Ps 105:28 concerning Bal Peor, "ἔφαγον θυσίας νεκρῶν" (and see Rev 2:14, which mentions this incident). See also Wis 15:17 and Heb 9:14, in a sacrificial context: "For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls…sanctifies for the purification, how much more shall the blood of Christ…purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living god." Since demons were frequently identified with the ghosts of the dead, "dead gods" could also be a synonym for demons. "Offering to the dead" is one of the standard descriptions in the Mishnah for idol offerings, see *m. Avot* 3:4; *m. ʿAboda Zarah* 2:3; *t. Ḥullin* 2:13, 18, 22. R. Yehuda ben Bteira (first century?) cites Ps 105:28 to prove the impurity of idolatry by a comparison to death defilement, *b. Ḥullin* 13a.

[44] Pliny, *Ep*. 10.96; Celsus, *Alethes Logos* apud *Cels*. 8.28; *Sib. Or*. 2.95–6; *6 Ezra* 16.69–70.

[45] For a good overview and analysis of this aspect, see Freidenreich (2011), 103–9.

[46] See below, pp. 83–90.

[47] Note that the object of the purity observed by the Jews is the food, while Christians are themselves pure.

argument is quite curious when considered in the context of an apology to a Roman Emperor, who could hardly be imagined to believe that eating food sacrificed to idols is defiling; clearly, this argument is targeted at a readership of Jews, Christians, or sympathizers of the Christian movement. Similarly, Justin compares Solomon's idolatry to the dedication of the Christian "gentiles who know God," who "would rather endure every torture and pain, even death itself, than worship idols, or eat meat sacrificed to idols."[48] Thus Christian apologists used abstinence from food sacrificed to idols as a proof of their greater dedication to God than the Jews'.

Opposing Christian groups were often accused of eating food offered to idols. This is already seen in Revelation 2:14, 20, where this accusation appears against two individuals, together with that of sexual immorality.[49] Following Justin's boast of Christian dedication, Trypho counters that some of the believers in Christ do in fact eat food offered to idols; Justin replies that these are Christians only in name, but are actually heretics, "impious atheists and wicked sinners."[50] In fact, this dietary rule is the only point of practice or theory imputed by Justin to the heretics he mentions. Expanding on this point, Irenaeus claims that Basilides, Saturninus, and the Valentinians do not believe that actions in the material world have any influence on man's spiritual status, and therefore commit many sins; together with sexual sin, "food sacrificed to idols they eat without scruple, thinking they in no way defile themselves (μολύνεσθαι) by it."[51] Clearly, such food was considered in the second century to be a source of defilement, which only heinous "heretics" would dare to contract. Irenaeus' wording suggests that not only was eating such food seen as an act of idolatry, but also the food itself was considered to be defiling. There is no external collaboration for the claim that gnostic Christians had less regard for this prohibition; rather, accusations of disregard for the dietary prohibition, always together with accusations of sexual sin, are used by these writers for defining the boundaries of orthodoxy.[52]

## *The impurity mechanism of food offered to idols according to Clement of Alexandria*

The prohibition of food sacrificed to idols, and even more its definition as defiling, is difficult to square with the statement that "what enters into the mouth

[48] *Dial*. 34.7; trans. Slusser and Falls, 53.

[49] See Cheung (1999), 197–209.

[50] *Dial*. 35.5. See Cheung (1999), 237–41.

[51] Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.6.3; trans. Unger, 37. See also 1.24.5, 2.14.5. For a later usage of the pollution of sacrifices as marking a border between orthodox and heretic, see Victorinus of Pettau, *Commentary on Revelation* 2.6.

[52] Cheung (1999) takes the accusations by John, Justin, and Irenaeus at face value, without any supporting argumentation. For the dynamic of sexual slander against rival groups together with accusations of idolatry, see Knust (2006), 143–64.

does not defile a man" and the rejection of the dietary laws. The first writer who refers to this issue is Clement of Alexandria.[53] The second book of the *Paedagogus* describes at length the dangers of excessive eating and the importance of frugality. In this context, Clement explains the prohibition of food offered to idols, through extensive citation of Paul's writings:

> I consider a defilement and an abomination (*Μιαρὰ δοκεῖ μοι καὶ βδελυρά*) foods that are spoken of as idol-offered…: upon the blood of them fly "the shades from out of Erybus now dead." "I would not have you become associates of demons," the Apostle says. There are two sorts of food, one ministering to salvation, and the other proper to those who perish. We should abstain from this last sort, not out of fear (for there is no power in them), but we detest it for the sake of our consciences, which are pure (*ἁγίαν*), and to show our abomination (*βδελυρίαν*) of the demons to whom they have been dedicated. And another reason is the impressionability of those who interpret so many things in a way that harms themselves, "whose conscience, being weak, is defiled." Now, "food does not commend us to God," "nor does what goes into a man defile him, but what comes out of the mouth,"…The physical act of eating is indifferent (*Ἀδιάφορος ἄρα ἡ φυσικὴ χρῆσις*)…But it is not right for those judged worthy of partaking of divine and spiritual food to share "the table of demons." "Have we not a right," the Apostle asks, "to eat and drink and to take about with us a woman?" But it stands to reason that we forestall passion when we keep pleasures under control.[54]

Jesus' principle of impurity is translated here into Stoic terminology: foods are *ἀδιάφορα*, or lacking in moral value, either good or bad.[55] However, this lack of moral value is clearly incompatible with the perception of foods offered to idols as defiled. In his solution to this problem, Clement builds on the foundations laid by Paul, with significant expansions and adaptations. First, Clement makes much heavier use of purity language, explicitly saying that food sacrificed to idols is polluted. Second, the possibility of defilement of conscience as a result of sacrifice, which Paul perceived as dangerous only to some members of the community, is expanded to all Christians. Third, Clement physically links the demons to the sacrifice: while Paul claimed that sacrifices are a "participation" with demons, here the demons hover around the sacrifice. This physicality is further augmented by the description of the victims' blood and the citation of the divinatory scene from the *Odyssey*. Clement's demons are not the gods of the nations, as Paul uses the term, but rather ghosts of the dead, which can be raised through divination. All of these elements—blood,

[53] For food in the *Paedagogus*, see Grimm (1996), 85–106; for the relationship of Clement's ethics to Stoic and Middle Platonic doctrines, see Maier (1995). For Clement's thought on the body in the *Paedagogus*, see Desjardins (2007).

[54] *Paed*. 2.1.8 (Marcovich 71, trans. adapted from Wood, 99–100). See also *Strom*. 4.15.97.

[55] See Clark (1977), 35–7; and compare Epictetus, *Diatr*. 2.5.1, who says that material things are *ἀδιάφορα*, but their "usage" (*χρῆσις*) is not.

the dead, and divination—have a well-established history as polluting and dangerous beings or practices.

As Gregory Smith has demonstrated, demons in this period were generally conceived as having a body, even if of a special and airy kind.[56] They were made of *pneuma* and could therefore move about very easily and also influence the emotions and thoughts of people, which were also manifestations of physical movements inside the human body. Demons were therefore dangerous to humans both physically and spiritually. One expression of the demons' physicality is their food—smoke and blood from sacrifices. Not only Christians believed that smoke and blood are the food of demons: this is a commonplace in the third century, found in Neoplatonic writers such as Porphyry and Iamblichus and in magic spells.[57] However, while supporters of sacrifice would have viewed such *daimones* as semi-divine beings which help to govern the world, most Christian theologians of this period identified demons as beings sent down to the material world following their sins shortly after the creation of the world. Since then, they spent their time scheming against God and leading humans to sin.[58]

Clement's thought brings the demons center stage and identifies them as the pollutants of the food. By this move, Clement can distance himself from the kind of impurity ascribed to the Jewish food laws. There, he claims, the food is impure naturally, in the state in which it was made by God. Here, the food is naturally indifferent, but it is the action of a moral agent, the demon, that makes it impure. Certainly, for Clement as well as for Origen after him, a demon cannot act on his own without the cooperation of the person, as that would undermine free will;[59] but in this case, it is the physical proximity of the person to the sacrifice that is seen as cooperation with the demon and choosing to be on his side. Clement emphasizes the moral and rational freedom of the person: Christians are to abstain from food sacrifices to idols "not because of fear," he says, "but to keep our consciences pure and to show our abomination of the demons." This pollution is built upon a rational, clear-headed decision of a free agent, and not upon fear, an irrational response. Nevertheless, physical impurity is created not just from the free agent's decision—if this were enough, the demon would be superfluous—but by the physical proximity of the demons to the sacrifice, which creates this defilement.

If the demons are the main agents of pollution, their action results in social division: "there are two sorts of food," suitable for two groups of people: those who eat divine food and those who eat from the table of demons. The differentiation of social groups is central to the Jewish dietary laws, as *Aristeas*

[56] Smith (2008). [57] Marx-Wolf (2010a). [58] Martin (2010).
[59] *Strom*. 2.20; Karavites (1999), 45–7.

explained. Thus, Clement understands the function of the Christian dietary laws to be quite similar to that of the Jewish laws.[60]

Lastly, this passage is part of a larger discussion of asceticism, specifically food asceticism, in Clement's *Paedagogus*. Clement closely follows here the formulation of the *Sentences of Sextus*, a second-century Christian compilation of gnomic sayings, concerning purity of food in general.[61] I intend to examine the relations between food asceticism and purity below, so here I will just note that the ascetic contextualization of the issue of food sacrificed to idols explains it by treating it as just another instance of the purification of the soul through renunciation of bodily pleasures. This contextualization is far from simple, however, because the problem with eating sacrifices is of a different order: it is their unique spiritual status which sets them aside from all other foods, including non-sacrificial meat.

## Blood and strangled animals

Abstinence from animal blood and non-slaughtered animals was widely practiced in late ancient Christianity. However, it was much less commented upon than the sacrifice prohibition.[62] The reason for this may be that it is mentioned in the NT only in the Apostles' Decree, as opposed to the idol sacrifices which are at the center of an extended Pauline discussion.[63] Mentions of abstinence from animal blood rarely refer to impurity, except when coupled together with the issue of idol sacrifices and/or murder of humans.[64] Since animal blood is not seen as a pollutant in the Hebrew Bible, but rather as a purifier in sacrifice (see above, pp. 49–50), there is little reason to expect this idea to be prominent in early Christian literature. In the Epistle to the Hebrews (9:22) blood is also

[60] Clement further underlines the similarities by noting (*Paed*. 2.1.17) that Jews were prohibited from eating the animals of Lev 11, but were not allowed even to touch animals that died, were strangled, or were offered to idols. (The first two are in Lev 11:26; the ritual impurity of idols is not biblical—see above, p. 56.) Thus, according to Clement, the common Christian observances (except for blood) are actually those which were considered most important also by the Jews.

[61] *Sextus* 108b–110; for a comparison between Clement, Sextus, and other texts, see Wilson (2012), 143–9.

[62] Most references to Christians not eating blood are made in passing, as if this observance was self-evident: *Letter from the Churches of Lyon and Vienne*, *apud* Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.1.25–26; Tertullian, *Pud*. 12.4–5; *Mon*. 5.3; *Apol*. 9.13; Minucius Felix, *Oct*. 30.6; Origen, *Hom. Num*. 16.9.1. For these and many later texts, see Böckenhoff (1907), 37–49; for references in Syriac martyrdom accounts, some of them early, see Becker (2003), n. 31. For an overview on blood in late ancient literature, see Boustan and Reed (2008b); for blood pollution in Roman religion, see Lennon (2013), 90–135.

[63] Bockmuehl (2000), 170, further argues that in antiquity animals were typically slaughtered, draining the meat of its blood, and that the consumption of blood would have required going out of your way.

[64] Tertullian *Apol*. 9.13 (cited below) is the only case known to me of consumption of blood described as polluting.

discussed as a purifier rather than a pollutant: "under the law, almost everything is purified with blood." Tertullian claims that Acts' prohibition of blood actually refers to spilling human blood, that is, to murder; however, he still says that Christians abstain from blood "that they may not contract pollution (*contaminemur*)."[65]

Though the possible impurity of spilling, emission, or consumption of human blood is a rather different issue, its relevance is indicated by *Jubilees*' coupling of the consumption of animal blood and the spilling of human blood in murder, echoed in the *Ps.-Clementines* (*Hom*. 8.15–17; *Rec*. 1.30). In the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple literature the pollution of human blood was typically associated with murder, idolatry, or female genital emissions, and was not a subject for dietary law. Murder, especially of the innocent, is the prime context for blood pollution, whether for Greeks, Romans, Jews, or Christians.[66] However, the *consumption* of human blood is brought to the fore by Jesus' statement, cited with different emphases in the various Gospels and in Paul, that his blood and flesh are consumed in the Eucharist, an idea that seems quite foreign to Jewish sensibilities. In a biblical context, modeled on the symbolic actions and metaphorical statements of the prophets, it is reasonable to understand the statement as figurative or metaphorical.[67] In any case, the question of impurity of blood does not arise in the texts; even John 6:52–61, which indicates that Jesus' statement was seen by some as offending (σκανδαλίζει, 6:61), the issue of eating blood (not to speak of its impurity) is not specified as the reason for this.[68] Despite the continuation of the prohibition on consuming blood in early Christianity, Jesus' blood was of course described by Christians as purifying, not defiling. Though accusations of cannibalism, including the drinking of blood, arose towards Christians in the second century, it has been pointed out that this was a common accusation against deviant groups, and many reasons beyond the body and blood imagery have been proposed for these accusations.[69]

## Meat, wine, and fasting

While food offered to idols, and perhaps blood, were broadly considered a defilement in early Christian writings, abstinence from meat and wine, and fasting in general, were much more common and central.

The First Epistle to Timothy, a pseudo-Pauline letter written at some time between the end of the first and the mid-second century, attacks its unidentified

[65] Tertullian, *Apol*. 9.13; *Pud*. 12.4–5.
[66] Is 1:15; *Mart. Pion*. 13.2; Lennon (2013), 92–100; Parker (1983), 104–43.
[67] See Chilton (1993); Klawans (2006), 215–17.
[68] Klawans (2006), 215–17. For an opposite view see Cahill (2002), who, however, conflates various types of Jewish blood prohibitions and labels all blood as impure.
[69] McGowan (1994).

opponents, who draw their authority from "deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,"[70] by focusing on their excessive abstinence from food and sex (1 Tim 4:1–5):[71]

> (3) They forbid marriage and demand abstinence (ἀπέχεσθαι) from foods,[72] which God created to be received with thanksgiving (εὐχαριστίας) by those who believe and know the truth. (4) For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, when it is received with thanksgiving; (5) for it is sanctified (ἁγιάζεται) by God's word and by prayer.

We have already seen the argument from a homogenously good creation in *Aristeas* (p. 48). Yet here we have another argument—the possibility of human ritual action in the material world, which demonstrates its essential goodness. Thanksgiving and sanctification through prayer and "God's word"[73] are seen as a religious attitude to food which is incommensurate with, and indeed an alternative to, the differentiation according to purity inherent in certain types of food, which does not depend on human attitudes towards it.[74]

Fasting had a number of functions in the early church.[75] As in many biblical and Second Temple period texts, it appears frequently together with prayer, as an act of contrition, humility, and penance.[76] As such, it magnifies the prayer's power, sometimes allowing the worshiper to have visions or prophecy, or to exorcise demons.[77] Fasting quickly became part of the permanent rituals of the church—already at the beginning of the second century, a fast preceded and

[70] For the common link in early Christian literature between false teachings or prophecies and impurity, see Horbury (1998a), 118–26.

[71] Cf. Titus 1:10–16, which identifies his opponents as "especially those of the circumcision" (1:10) who "pay attention to Jewish myths" (1:14). Titus was apparently charged by his opponents that they are purer due to their observance, to which he responds: "To the pure all things are pure (πάντα καθαρὰ τοῖς καθαροῖς), but to the defiled (μεμιαμμένοις) and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are defiled." 1 Tim 4:1–5 supplies little information on the background of its rivals; the various options proposed by scholars are naturally dependent upon the dating of the document: see von Campenhausen (1972), 181; Marshal (1999), 531–5. And see below in the sexual context, p. 170.

[72] Timothy is elsewhere urged to keep himself pure by not abstaining from wine, for health reasons (5:22–3).

[73] The meaning here of "God's word" is unclear; for various options see Marshal (1999), 546, who opts for Gen 1:31 stating that all creation is good, or to scripture used in blessings over food.

[74] And see 1 Cor 10:26–31; Rom 14:6; Tomson (1990), 254–8. In rabbinic traditions, blessings are at times seen as an alternative to sacrificial cult (and hence to one type of religious attitude towards food) but not to food purity or the dietary laws: see *t. Ber* 4:1 with Bokser (1981).

[75] See Finn (2009), 58–71.

[76] Hermas, *Sim*. 5.1–3; *Acts of Thomas* 20, 29, 139, 145; Origen, *Hom. Lev*. 10.2; *Hom. Jos*. 1.7; *Hom. Jer*. 20.7.5; *Hom. Num*. 25.4; *Fr. 1 Cor*. 24; Tertullian, *Paen*. 9, 11; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.16.2, 41.6.

[77] Prophecy: Arbesmann (1949); Trevett (1996), 105–9; Hermas, *Vis*. 2.2.1, 3.1.2, 3.10.6; Tertullian, *De jejun*. 7–9, 12; *de anima* 48. Demons: Matt 17:21; Origen, *Comm. Matt*. 13.6–7; *Hom. Ex*. 2.3; *Hom. Jos*. 24.1; *Ps.-Clementine Ep*. I.12.5.

prepared for baptism,[78] and was obligatory on certain days.[79] While these functions and meanings of fasting may have been conceptualized as purification (raising the level of the person by removing inferior elements, permitting enhanced contact with the sacred), such a description is rarely found in texts from the first three centuries. One exception is in Clement's *Prophetic Eclogues* (14):

> Fasting, according to the signification of the word, is abstinence from food. Now food makes us neither more righteous nor less. But mystically it shows that, as life is maintained in individuals by food, and want of food is the token of death; so also ought we to fast from worldly things… Especially does fasting empty the soul of matter, and make it, along with the body, pure and light (καθαρὰν καὶ κούφην) for the divine words. Worldly food is, then, the former life and sins; but the divine food is faith, hope, love, patience, knowledge, peace, temperance. For "blessed are they that hunger and thirst after" God's "righteousness, for they shall be filled." The soul, but not the body, it is which is susceptible of this craving.[80]

Although Clement speaks of fasting as a symbol,[81] he apparently does not relinquish the simple meaning of the word when he says that it makes both the soul and the body "pure and light." Fasting (both actual and symbolic) purifies the soul by emptying it of matter, the external effects of which can be seen on the body.

Dietary self-control and moderation, expressed in eating only the minimum required for health, are a central aspect of Clement's advice in the *Paedagogus* for living a "Christian life." Overeating and extravagance in food are damaging to the health, and indulging in food for pleasure's sake is dangerous to the soul. There is little that is new in this type of discourse, which was already well developed by Hellenistic and Roman philosophers.[82] Clement rarely uses purity language when exhorting for alimentary moderation. This can be compared to the ready deployment of such language in the *Sentences of Sextus*, 108b–110: "Overindulgence in food creates impurity (ἀκρασία σιτίων ἀκάθαρτον ποιεῖ). The usage of living things is indifferent (χρῆσις μὲν ἀδιάφορον), but abstinence (ἀποχή) is more rational. It is not food and drink going in through the mouth that defile (μιαίνει) a person, but things going forth from an evil character."[83] Sentence 110 is a close rendition of Mark 7:15/Matthew 15:11, but its message is integrated with the impurity of excessive eating as well as a degree of vegetarianism to produce a somewhat contradictory message.

We have already seen Paul's witness on avoidance of wine and meat and the eating of vegetables in the Roman community, as well as his use of purity language to describe these dietary customs. The sentences quoted above from

[78] *Did*. 2.7; Justin, *Apol*. 1.61; Tertullian, *Bapt*. 20; Clement, *Ecl*. 84; Ps.-Clem. *Hom*. 3.73, 11.35, 13.9, 11. *Rec*. 3.67; 6.15; 7.34–7.

[79] *Did*. 8; Origen, *Hom. Lev*. 10.2.

[80] Trans. *ANF* VIII.44.

[81] For this idea, see *Hermas*, *Sim*. 5.3.1–3, *Gospel of Thomas* 14, 27; Clement, *Strom*. 3.15.99.4.

[82] See Grimm (1996), 32–56.

[83] Wilson (2012), 143.

*Sextus* typify one strand of early Christian thought on the matter: eating meat is not prohibited, but is also not recommended. In the *Stromateis* (7.6), Clement claims that meat burdens the soul and the rational faculties, but in the *Paedagogus* it is seen merely as another opportunity for immoderation, and not as a defiled or defiling substance. Origen, too, points out that scripture does not prohibit meat as the Pythagoreans do, though he then cites Paul's call for respect towards meat- and wine-abstinence, and explains that such abstinence promotes a "safer and purer life (ἀσφαλεστέρου βίου καὶ καθαρωτέρου)"—a rather different reason than that provided by Paul himself.[84] Christians, says Origen, indeed abstain from blood or meat offered to idols, not as a general abstinence from meat but in order to avoid demons; furthermore, all gluttonous eating is prohibited, not only eating of meat (*Cels*. 8.30). Origen may be reacting here not only to Celsus' suggestion that Christians should adopt Pythagorean practice, but to a prevalent early Christian practice of abstinence from meat and wine.

Most of the evidence for this vegetarianism comes from reports on Christian groups primarily located in Syria and Asia Minor. According to their detractors, Marcion, Tatian, some of the followers of Saturninus, Ebionites, Elkasites, Encratites, and the Baptist group which Mani grew up with, all abstained from meat.[85] In the second- and third-century Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, the apostles never eat meat, and frequently fast or limit themselves to bread, water, and salt. We rarely receive reports for the reasoning behind this abstention, however. Alistair McGowan argues that the main reason for the vegetarianism of these groups was the association of meat with pagan sacrifice; its rejection signaled total repudiation of pagan culture and a commitment to an alternative society. The best support for this argument comes from *Ps.-Clementine* literature, where the eating of meat and blood are strongly tied to the historical development of sacrifice,[86] and from the *Acts of Andrew* (53), where demons are said to be revitalized by eating meat. As McGowan himself recognizes, however, the sacrificial association is only one aspect of meat consumption; vegetarianism was also a conscious choice to reject luxury and to adopt a symbol of poverty, and, as suggested by the Alexandrian authors, an opportunity for self-discipline. Some of them may have abstained as a continuation of Jewish observance, though there is no proof for this. In any case, Christian authors, even those strongly opposed to eating meat, did not describe meat itself as polluting. Rather, vegetarianism and general dietary restrictions were seen as part of a purer life of *askesis*. The purity discourse is focused here not on the substances eaten but rather on the resulting lifestyle as a whole.

[84] *Cels*. 8.28 (Marcovich 544).

[85] Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.24.2; Epiphanius, *Pan*. 30.15.3–4, 30.22.3–5, 53.1.4; Tert. *jejun*. 15.1, *de cult. Fem*. 2.9; Hippolytus, *Haer*. 8.13; *CMC* 91–4. See McGowan (1999a), 143–74; Stewart-Sykes (2002). Manichaeans, too, did not eat meat, but this was only part of a more complex dietary regime.

[86] *Rec*. 4.13–36.

Wine abstinence was frequently linked with meat abstinence. Already in the Hebrew Bible, avoiding wine is the hallmark of officiating priests and the *nazir* (Lev 10:9; Num 6:3); it was certainly not seen as polluting, however. For a moralist such as Clement, drunkenness was the diametrical opposite of self-control (*Paed*. 2.25-7). Among early Christian groups, especially in Asia Minor and Syria, there was a widespread tradition of using water, not wine, for the Eucharist, doubtless reflecting a more general abstinence from wine. This too is seen by A. McGowan primarily as an attempt by these groups to differentiate themselves from the "cuisine of sacrifice," which included wine libations, but was doubtless also based on the other associations of wine with luxury and drunkenness, and with the self-identification of some Christians as "mourners" and perpetual penitents for their sins.[87] Again, the question here is of an ascetic lifestyle seen in general as pure, and less the impurity of the substance itself.[88]

## Summary

Idolatry, animal blood, meat, and wine figure as possible sources for dietary impurity in second- and third-century Christian texts.

Idolatry is the major type of dietary impurity, figuring most often in the texts. Already in Paul, and much developed in Clement, Origen, and the *Ps.-Clementines*, is the idea that this impurity is mediated through demons. Demonology allows Christian thinkers to maintain the possibility of defilement of meat, dangerous and transferrable to humans through consumption, in spite of the general principle of the insignificance of food as an object of defilement and the Gospels' insistence that defilement ultimately comes from the heart. The impurity of food offered to idols had obvious social implications of differentiation between Christians and pagans, and this was certainly one of its main functions.

The complexity of the moral status of defilement of food offered to demons can be demonstrated by examining it in terms of the three dimensions outlined in the introduction—relationship to the body, agency, and supernatural beings. The defilement is created and transferred by the act of sacrifice, and therefore outside the body. At the same time, Clement emphasizes the role of the *suneidesis* or the mind in creating defilement or at least in causing it to adhere to the worshiper. Other writers, however (*Didache*, Justin, Aristides), do not mention any interior aspect. This is reflected also in the dimension of agency—Clement highlights the human intentionality needed for defilement to pass from the food to the person, and the demons too have a degree of agency so that defilement is not created automatically. Lastly, for Clement the involvement of supernatural

[87] See Griffith (1995), 234–5.

[88] See Epiphanius, *Pan*. 45.1.6–8 on Severus, a third-century figure, who compares wine to poison.

entities mediating the effect of the physical object on the mind or *suneidesis* connects it to a larger context of good and evil. On all these dimensions, therefore, Clement makes a clear effort to provide defilement with moral credentials.

Beyond idolatry, animal blood was generally not eaten by Christians of the first centuries. Blood may have been seen as intrinsically polluted for consumption, and for Christians writers (following certain currents in Second Temple literature), it had connotations of idolatrous sacrifices and murder, both sins described as creating impurity in the Hebrew Bible. Some Christian groups abstained from meat and wine, while others practiced fasting. Though the precise background for the wine and meat abstinence is unclear, it was at times described using purity language. The purity discourse in this case is of a general ascetic regime leading to a pure life, rather than the pinpointing of specific substances as impure for consumption.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE BIBLICAL DIETARY LAWS IN SECOND- AND THIRD-CENTURY TEXTS

The biblical dietary laws were widely perceived by Christian writers of the first centuries to be one of the most salient features of Jewish religion.[89] As we saw earlier (pp. 48–9), both in the perception of Greco-Roman culture and in Jewish self-perception, the dietary laws were a defining feature of Judaism. The importance of these laws in polemics and discussions between Jews and non-Jews in antiquity is unsurprising in light of their probable practical role in hindering close Jewish interaction with non-Jewish society.

As we saw, the dietary laws were not clearly condemned in the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, or in the first-century Pauline tradition.

By the second century, however, some Christian texts presented a much more negative attitude, declaring that the dietary laws, together with the other two prominent Jewish identity markers of ancient discourse—Shabbat observance and circumcision—were not binding upon Christians. Furthermore, the dietary laws were rejected not only as relating to food, but as a central dimension of Jewish ritual purity laws. The amalgamation of the purity laws and the dietary laws as a homogenous construct of Jewish ritual purity, already well under way in Mark 7, led to the positioning of dietary laws as the main target for anti-Jewish rhetoric, with all the NT passages concerning food and purity now seen as directed at the dietary laws. This move may have had a strategic advantage. The dietary laws differentiated between Jews and non-Jews, while

[89] To the best of my knowledge, there is no comprehensive study dedicated to Christian perceptions of biblical dietary law after the second century CE. Stein (1957) is a general overview omitting many sources. Tomson (1999) is an excellent study, but it is mostly dedicated to NT texts.

purity laws were typically an inter-Jewish matter. Therefore, focusing on the "xenophobic" dietary laws as emblematic of Jewish purity helped Christian writers (consciously or not) identify Jewish purity laws in general as typifying Jews only, an important step towards their delegitimization.

Patristic discussions of biblical dietary laws typically have two dimensions: rejection of the practice of the dietary laws and alternative interpretations for them. In the first, Christian writers polemicize against the implementation of the laws, making use of NT prooftexts perceived to oppose Jewish Law in general and the dietary laws in particular. Straightforward opposition to the laws is sometimes challenged by Christian abstinence from food offered to idols, which raises the question of why certain food observances stemming from the Hebrew Bible are legitimate, while others are not. The rejection of the laws as guide to practice raised the need for alternative interpretations, which uphold the text of the Old Testament but annul its binding force as a practical obligation. These interpretations vary, but can be classed into four general categories: allegorical, ascetic, historical, and demonological. The interpretations are targeted at two audiences: those with doubts as to the validity of the Old Testament, who require an explanation of its continuing significance; and those influenced by Jewish practice, who therefore require an alternative, non-practical interpretation.

## Arguments concerning the dietary laws in the second century

### *The symbolic alternative*

The *Epistle of Barnabas* is the earliest Christian text which clearly rejects the dietary laws as practical precepts regarding food, accompanied by their alternative interpretation.[90] Moses, who spoke "in the Spirit," was relating in these laws symbolically to different kinds of people who should be shunned; "but they [i.e., the non-Christian Jews] received his words according to the desires of their flesh (κατ᾽ ἐπιθυμίαν τῆς σαρκός) as if he were actually speaking about food (10.9)." As we saw, symbolic interpretations of the dietary laws were already put forward by *Aristeas* and Philo, and *Barnabas* may have adopted similar interpretations of other Jewish authors. Here, however, symbolism replaces practice rather than explains it. This rejection was clearly the result of *Barnabas*' attempt to reinforce an identity totally opposed to Torah-practicing Jews: language of We vs. Them abounds in the letter. As in *Aristeas*, identity is behind the dietary laws, but precisely in an opposite way: for *Aristeas*, maintaining these laws safeguarded Jewish identity, while for *Barnabas*, the understanding that they should be rejected is the hallmark of a Christian.[91]

[90] See Hanson (1959), 97–8; Grant (1980), 306–7; Paget (1994), 149–54.
[91] See Freidenreich (2011), 102.

While the author of *Barnabas* does not provide any substantive argument against the dietary laws, their rejection in these terms is innovative. The idea of the Law being "fleshy" as opposed to the "spirit" of the believers would appear to be Pauline (Gal 5:16–18; Rom 7:5–6, 2:28–9; 2 Cor 3:12–17); but its application to the dietary laws, and their resulting rejection, is new. Also new, at least in a Christian context, is the explicit expression that a literal understanding or hermeneutic of the Hebrew Bible is "fleshly," as opposed to a symbolic, "spiritual" hermeneutic.[92] *Barnabas* claims that the dietary laws were never supposed to be practiced, not even before the coming of Christ; their true "spiritual" interpretation was just not understood by the Jews, because of their preoccupation with food.

Although impurity is not mentioned in *Barnabas*' discussion, the idea of contagion, one of the hallmarks of the biblical impurity rules, is retained and transferred to the social realm, in that the prohibited animals symbolize people to whom a believer must not "cling" (κολληθήσῃ) or "be like" (ὁμοιωθήσῃ; 10.3–8). Here *Barnabas* differs from *Aristeas*, for whom the symbolism is more direct, referring to the vices themselves. Another innovation of *Barnabas* is in the central place of sexual sins: these are symbolized by three different animals, while in *Aristeas* they are not mentioned at all.[93] Philo already interpreted the dietary laws as relating to desire (ἐπιθυμία) of all kinds, but did not single out sex nor did he create a clear and detailed correspondence as here. As scholars have noted, the section concerning sexual sin (10.6–8) is awkwardly inserted, signaling that it is an addition to a borrowed text.[94] The centrality of sex as the main Christian body issue, and therefore its centrality in Christian purity discourse and its use for explaining food issues, is already found here.

*Barnabas*' symbolic alternative was taken up as the dominant—though not the only—interpretation by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen.[95] Irenaeus takes advantage of the division afforded by the two signs of purity for quadrupeds—chewing cud and parting hoofs—to express a four-fold division into Christian (pure on both counts), heretics and Jews (each have one sign but

[92] Boyarin (1994) claims this for Paul himself; but Paul nowhere speaks of a literal interpretation as fleshly and a figurative one as spiritual. For criticism of Boyarin, see Barclay (1998); Dawson (2001), 1–46. For the relationship of Barnabas and Paul, see Horbury (1998a), 143 and Paget (1996).

[93] The change is clearest in the case of the weasel: both cite the biological "fact" that it conceives through the ears and bears young through the mouth, but *Aristeas* (165–6) interprets this as referring to evil speech, and *Barnabas* (10.8) to oral sex, which he describes as "lawless" and "impure."

[94] Paget (1994), 150.

[95] As well as Augustine, who contributed to it becoming the most dominant approach to the dietary laws in the Latin world. However, Stein (1957), 153, who claims that "the fathers of the church after the third century merely reiterate the principal Christian objections against dietary laws…which in their view can only be considered as σύμβολα or τύποι or αἰνιγματικῶς," ignored the other options discussed here.

not the other, and so impure), and pagans (impure on both counts).[96] Again, the dietary laws are used to define the identity of Christians versus others (especially heretics), though here on a more symbolical level. The parallelism to the dietary laws is hardly rigorous, however, since in the same passage he compares heretics also to cattle, swine, dogs, and all irrational animals. The symbolic impurity of the dietary laws is merged with the more general idea of animality as a negative trait, symbolizing gluttony, lust, and "filthiness."

Clement of Alexandria is the first writer who produced an extant comprehensive discussion of the dietary laws relying on NT prooftexts. Symbolic interpretations are a major aspect of his understanding of these laws: *Barnabas* is cited twice as an example for a correct symbolic reading,[97] and he emphasizes that the dietary laws concern association with different kind of people by "some sort of allegory" or "metaphor": "the unclean (ἀκαθάρτοις) who, like swine, revel in bodily pleasures and filthy habits of life" or those who "make their living by plundering others" (birds of prey).[98] Elsewhere, he puts forward an interpretation very similar to that of Irenaeus.[99]

### *Jewish as opposed to Christian identity*

Written between 120 and 150, the *Apology of Aristides* casts Jews as superior to pagans and yet inferior to Christians, through a description of Jewish law based on Col 2:16 and a parallel description of Christian morals, worship, and laws.[100] For Aristides, while the Jews believe they worship God they actually worship angels, "as when they celebrate sabbaths and the beginning of the months…and fasting and circumcision and the purity of foods (ܕܟܝܝܬܐ ܘܕܟܝܟܘܬܐ), which, however, they do not observe perfectly" (14.4).[101] Other than the explicit mention of purity regarding food, also of interest is the claim of the Jews' imperfect observance, which shows that the author had some degree of respect for these laws.[102] Aristides then describes the superior Christian observances, which include a number of food-related issues: abstaining from food offered to idols, fasting for a number of days to give food to the poor, and always giving thanks for food and drink. Here too, as in Barnabas, there is little essential argument

[96] Irenaeus, *Haer*. 5.8.3 (Rousseau, II.112–17). [97] Clement, *Strom*. 2.15; 5.51–2.
[98] *Paed*. 3.11.75–6 (Marcovich 190–1, trans. Wood, 256–7). [99] *Strom*. 7.109.3.
[100] For the dating, see Pouderon (2003), 32–7. Justin, *Dial*. 46, also appears to be based on Col 2:16 but surprisingly omits the reference to food and drink: see Hirshman (1996), 55–9.
[101] This part is extant only in Syriac and is missing in the Greek version. Grant (1988), 38, 45, argues that the Syriac is from a revision postdating Hadrian's death in 138; but see the criticism of Pouderon (2003), 35–6. Aristides totally avoids any mention of Jewish scriptures, while mentioning Christian scriptures multiple times. The positive practices of the Jews come to them simply "from their forefathers."
[102] Pouderon (2003), 382 understands this to mean that they perform the commandments only externally and not according to their spiritual meaning, similar to *Barnabas* above. This, however, is not the simple meaning of the text, which focuses on practical issues; furthermore, there would be no need for the "however" (ܗܘ).

against the dietary laws. Jews, while depicted relatively positively as regards their theology and charity, perform a type of ritual more suitable to angels than to God, though why this is so is not explained. From the comparison with the Christian observances we may surmise that Aristides believed they lacked a moral dimension. But mostly, Jews and Christians are simply two different kinds (γένη) of people (2.2).[103] Christians and Jews may share certain beliefs (the unity of God) or practices (charity) but they are divided by ritual.

The anti-Jewish rhetoric is much strengthened in a later adaptation of Col. 2:16 to Jews, by the *Epistle to Diognetus*, in the late second century (4.1–2):[104]

> I do not think you need to learn from me about their anxiety (ψοφοδεές) over food (βρώσεις), their superstition about the sabbath, their arrogance over circumcision and the pretense they make of fasting and of their celebration of the new moon—ridiculous matters and unworthy of argument. For how is it not completely unwarranted to accept some of the things created by God for human use as made well (καλώς), but to reject others as useless (ἄχρηστα) and superfluous (περισσά)?[105]

The precepts of the law regarding food, Sabbath, circumcision, and festivals are denigrated and ridiculed. We have already seen the argument from the homogeneity of creation in *Aristeas* and in 1 Timothy, though here it is more pointed and detailed. As opposed to *Barnabas*, the writer does not even see any need to explain the meaning of the Hebrew Bible. He is rather intent on distinguishing Jewish from Christian worship and custom: while the former have unique and strange customs which separate them from the rest of society, Christians follow local custom, and "their worship of God remains invisible" (6.4).

### *Historical and ascetic arguments*

Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, in the mid-second century, brings new arguments to the table. For Justin, the main perspective on the Mosaic Law is historical: while the Law's moral precepts were always valid, and indeed performed by the patriarchs, its ritual precepts were a temporary response to a specific historical situation, that of Israel following the Golden Calf incident. Thus these laws, including the dietary laws, ritual purity, circumcision, and the like, are no longer valid in Christ's new covenant.[106] In the case of the dietary laws, this historical reconstruction is corroborated by God's permission to

[103] For the significance of religious practice and other factors as determiner of γένη, see Lieu (1996); Buell (2008), who discusses Aristides on pp. 35–6, 46.

[104] For the dating see Grant (1988), 178–9.

[105] Ehrman II.137.

[106] Justin, *Dial.* 44–6; see Stylianopoulos (1975); de Jonge (1985); Rokeah (2002), 43–60. Justin's argument is found again in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26, though without specific emphasis on the dietary laws. The *Didascalia* differentiates between the "first legislation" (the Decalogue) and the "second legislation" (the rest of the Torah's laws); the latter were a punishment to the Jews following the sin of the golden calf.

Noah to eat every kind of meat "as the green herbs,"[107] showing the impurity of animals was indeed a temporary measure. Since the laws were a reaction to a specific sin, they are no longer relevant for those no longer under its power.

The dietary laws were, according to Justin, an educative and preventive measure, protecting the Jews from the possible influence of eating and turning it into an act of religious significance. Eating at times causes sin, and so the Jews "were likewise ordered to abstain from eating certain kinds of food, so that while eating and drinking you would keep God before your eyes, for you have always been disposed to forget him."[108] The prohibited foods were not chosen at random, however, but were rather "of the impure, harmful and violent animals (*ἀκαθάρτων καὶ ἀδίκων καὶ παρανόμων*)." These animals, it appears, are not impure simply by power of divine decree, but are impure (here synonymous with harmful) from their nature; it is only the prohibition of such animals which is temporary and specific, while the impurity abides. The dietary laws are given an ascetic, rather than a symbolic rationale, though it is circumscribed to a specific time and people. Justin relies here on the Pauline notion of the relative force of impurity: although food is indeed impure in some cases, it is only the "weak" who are susceptible to it.[109]

For Justin, the dietary laws were God's instrument for educating the people when confronted with an extraordinary situation calling for extraordinary measures. Therefore, they are not ontologically meaningful nor do they convey any moral meaning, even symbolically. On the other hand, he upholds the factual usefulness of these laws at a certain point in history, a position accepted by all Christian writers except for *Barnabas*, for whom the dietary laws never had a literal meaning.[110]

The ascetic interpretation found in Philo and alluded to by Justin was adopted towards the end of the second century by Clement of Alexandria, who as we saw also made use of symbolic interpretations.[111] Biblical law is seen by Clement

[107] *Dial.* 20.2, and see Rokeah (2002), 109–16. Justin claims here that the Jews interpret "as the green herbs" as meaning that as only some herbs are eaten, so also only some animals are allowed. Such an interpretation, while possible, is not found in rabbinic sources, which generally hold the position that the dietary laws are intended only for Jews; its strangeness indicates that it is a straw-man argument for Justin to knock down. Rokeah (2002), 116, nevertheless concludes that "Justin's disputants were Hellenistic Jews whose apologetic exegesis about this issue he quoted—and challenged."

[108] *Dial.* 20.1 (Marcovich 102, trans. Falls and Slusser, 33).

[109] Historical explanations are later most dominant in the Syriac and Syrian tradition; see Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 15; Theodore Bar Koni, *Book of the Scholia* 3.41; Isodad of Merv, *Commentary on Leviticus* 11. This interpretation also appears in Procopius, *Comm. Lev. PG* 87.728.

[110] As observed by Paget (1994), 152–4.

[111] The mix of symbolism and asceticism is also found in Philo, from whom Clement frequently draws, especially in biblical exegesis. See Runia (1993), 132–56; and concerning food and the dietary laws, Grimm (1996), 99–100, 235 n.109: "The tenor of Clement's discussion throughout his treatment of food echoes not Aristotle but Philo with his repeated warnings against the dire consequences of pleasure."

as an instrument for healing the soul, and the dietary laws are integrated into this theme.[112] They therefore received a stamp of approval unprecedented in earlier second-century explanations, and quite rare in later ones.

The discussion of the dietary laws in the *Paedagogus* (2.1.16–17) opens with a number of examples from the Gospels of dietary abstinence (John's ascetic diet, Matthew's vegetarianism, and Peter's avoidance of pigs), followed by the citation of three passages indicating the opposite: Peter's vision (Acts 10); Jesus' saying that nothing outside a person can defile (Mark 7:15); and God's statement to Adam that "all these things shall be food for you."[113] The latter passages show, Clement says, that "the usage [of foods] is indifferent (*ἀδιάφορος ἡ χρῆσις*)," using Stoic terminology for things lacking moral valence, which are neither good nor bad.[114] What defiles is not food, but "wrong opinions concerning intemperance (*ἡ περὶ τῆς ἀκρασίας διάληψις κενή*)."

The effect of food on the person was anything but indifferent for Clement, however, as the book-length discussion in the *Paedagogus* of all matters pertaining to food demonstrates; even if food itself is indifferent, the passions it nurtures are not. Clement therefore turns to a well-known Aristotelian principle: in food matters, as in all else, we should avoid the extremes and practice the middle way, and this means to eat only what is necessary. The biblical dietary laws, however, went beyond the mean, to utmost frugality.[115] Only a small number of foods were permitted to the Jews, "for since it is impossible for those who use dainties to abstain from partaking of them, he appointed the opposite mode of life, till he should break down the propensity to indulgence arising from habit."[116] The dietary laws were a radical measure, but they were needed in order to break the opposite habit.[117] Clement's explanation here is very close to Justin's, though it is translated into philosophical terminology. As opposed to Justin, Clement does not restrict the validity of the laws, or explain if this education was only temporary, or perhaps is still necessary.

In a passage in the *Stromateis* (2.20.105), Clement explains that swine and fish without scales are fat and fattening, and therefore forbidden in order to "discipline us" (*προπαιδεύει ἡμᾶς*) and "check our desires" (*στέλλων ἡμῶν*

[112] See *Strom.* 1.171; 6.133–48; *Paed.* 3.89.1, with Maier (1995), 725–8.

[113] This verse refers only to vegetables, and not to meat. Clement, as a hesitant vegetarian, may have preferred it to Justin's prooftext from Noah, which explicitly allows meat.

[114] The *ἀδιάφορα* are also known as "intermediates" (e.g., Cicero, *Fin.* 3.58–9); this does not connote the golden mean but rather things which are neither good nor evil. For the distinction, see Plutarch, *Virt. mor.* 444E. For the middle way in Clement and Middle Platonism, see Clark (1977), 28–34.

[115] It is also possible to read Clement as saying that the frugality of the dietary laws is itself the golden mean, and accordingly to read the sentence on the breaking of habits as concerning only the laws forbidding touching dead animals or those offered to idols. In this case, the dietary laws would appear to exemplify the preferred way for all.

[116] *Paed.* 2.1.17 (Marcovich 77, trans. *ANF* II.242).

[117] For the attainment of the virtuous middle by practicing the extreme, see Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 2.9 (1109B).

τὰς ἐπιθυμίας).[118] Here, Clement comes quite close to claiming that certain dietary laws are still valid for Christians, for ascetic reasons. Such interpretation invests the biblical dietary laws with inherent content, and integrates them into the ascetic worldview of late antique Christianity.[119] The idea that abstinence from eating and/or differentiation between animals can be useful on a moral level is also at the basis of the historical solutions; however, Clement goes beyond them to confirm the general moral value of the dietary laws.

## CONCLUSIONS

The general attitude of Christian writers of this period towards the Jewish dietary rules is negative. They were seen as distinctively Jewish and thus their rejection was part of Christian identity formation, especially since Jewish-Christian groups continued to practice these laws. Second-century writers developed a wide range of strategies to incorporate the biblical dietary laws into their theological and ethical systems while minimizing their practical significance, limiting it to specific circumstances, or using it as support for a general ascetic project. The main motivation of these writers was to argue for the irrelevance of the dietary laws and thus to differentiate Christian from Jewish food customs. Christian customs are constructed as representing internal purity, powered by human agency and linked to questions of good and evil, while Jewish law is constructed as representing external purity, lacking in agency and moral value. In an article on early Christian attitudes to dietary impurity, Peter Tomson states that "it is not the contents of Jewish food and purity laws which makes the Church Fathers condemn them, but their being labeled as Jewish. For similar practices observed in their own gentile Christian communities are labeled positively."[120] Although the practices are indeed similar, it is not simply the identity of the practitioners which makes the difference: the dietary practices pass through a prism of interpretation which provides them with very different meanings, as "true" or "false" impurity. The identification of the practices as Jewish or Christian occurred together with a process of providing them with

[118] In a discussion of vegetarianism (*Strom.* 7.33.1) Clement mentions that the Jews regard pigs as impure because of their destructive habits, but then cites others who regard them as best for eating precisely for this reason, or because they are otherwise useless, while yet others abstain from them due to their "propensity for sex (διὰ τὸ κατωφερὲς εἰς συνουσίαν)."

[119] For exegetical strategies incorporating ritual biblical laws into the ascetic worldview, see Clark (1999), esp. 204–32. Tertullian's attitude is similar to Clement's; in his reply to Marcion, he writes that the laws are "a measure for encouraging continence," subduing cravings for lust and luxury and facilitating fasting (*Marc.* 2.20.1; *Jejun.* 5), all positive, and not specifically Jewish, results. Tertullian does not emphasize the link of these objectives to any historical event, though he mentions the Israelites' craving after Egyptian cucumbers and melons.

[120] Tomson (1999), 201.

opposite significance, thereby changing their content and accommodating them to their role in the perception of "Judaism" and "Christianity."

At the same time, Christian interpretations sought to infuse spiritual elements into the laws in order to co-opt them for the Christian project and justify scripture, and this was done on a number of levels. The primary level was symbolic interpretation, which totally circumvented any material aspects through the creation of direct equivalence between impurity and morally valued acts or persons. However, non-symbolic interpretations also have an important role in this transformation: in historical interpretations, the laws were seen as one of the stages of a moral education; in ascetic interpretations, as instances of a general moral discourse; and in the demonological interpretation, as taking a position in the spiritual confrontation between evil demons and god-fearing men. The practical understanding of impurity is rejected, but it is allowed to take up a significant role when coupled with the accepted moral discourse.

For the symbolic interpretations, the *impurity* of animals does not have much significance: it simply accompanies their prohibition, and both are discussed as one. The concept of defilement contagion is retained to some degree in the symbolic interpretations which speak of people from whom one should distance himself, as from a source of impurity. It is only in the *Epistle to Diognetus* (echoing 1 Tim) that we find a substantial argument against the concept of impurity in relation to the dietary laws. For Clement, who interpreted the impurity of animals ascetically, the question of purity would appear to be more relevant, since the prohibited animals physically influence the person eating them. Clement, however, was more inclined to use Aristotelian and Stoic terms than concepts of purity and pollution to describe his views on food.

The metaphors of "battle" and "truce" (see above, p. 11) provide an effective perspective for understanding the Christian transformation of food impurity. For Christian writers after the first century, conducting a dialogue of the deaf with non-Christian Jews, a truce model of food defilement was unacceptable and even incomprehensible. They simply could not conceive of terms of impurity as lacking clear moral significance, as not participating in the cosmic battle of good and evil. They therefore read the biblical food laws through a battle perspective, and in this light Jewish practice appeared to be inadequate and illogical. The problem for them was not the prohibition or impurity of foods per se; it was rather that the way Jews practiced their food impurity appeared arbitrary, out of sync with the cosmic patterns. Christian explanations of food impurity (demonological, allegorical, ascetic) are all attempts to force the biblical laws into a battle model, which would make them comprehensible again.

# 4

# Early Christian Attitudes Towards Death Defilement

In most ancient religions, including Judaism, human corpses were perceived as creating defilement which required purification.[1] Corpses or people defiled by death were prohibited entry to sacred space, and sacred people (e.g., priests) were denied entry to spaces defiled by death. This defilement was contagious to some extent, and could pass to other people or objects through touch or familial ties. From the fourth century onwards, most Christians rejected this perception, and allowed—even approved of—the introduction of corpses into sacred space.

Scholarly examinations of Christian rejection of death defilement typically focus on the breaking down of traditional barriers between the living and the dead found in the cult of the saints, through which the relics of the saints become part of the religious and social landscape.[2] Indeed, many of the ancient sources discuss death defilement in the context of the cult of the saints. However, this approach is less pertinent to the third century, when the cult of the saints was much less developed than in the fourth and fifth centuries. Furthermore, this approach does not take sufficient notice of Christian views towards other dimensions of impurity in this period as a context for views on death defilement, or try to understand how death defilement concepts influenced other impurity dimensions.[3]

## EARLY EVIDENCE

Some conception of death defilement is assumed in the Gospels. Continuing on the image of cleaning the outside and inside of the cup, Jesus compares the Pharisees to "whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but

[1] See above, pp. 22–3, 39. An early version of this chapter appeared as Blidstein (2013).

[2] E.g., Brown (1981), 1–12; Wortley (2006).

[3] Three recent monographs give attention to the significance of defilement: Samellas (2002), esp. 146–77; Volp (2002), esp. 247–63; McCane (2003), 109–26. None of them, however, discuss the question of death defilement in the context of Christian attitudes towards impurity in general, and only the last of them attempts to provide a timeline of the development of attitudes towards death impurity.

inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of impurity (πάσης ἀκαθαρσίας). So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matt 23:27). As in the much more developed issues of food impurity, here too the opposition of inside versus outside is emphasized, and here too true defilement is that which is on the inside; rituals concerning the outside only (whitewashing, which marks the impurity but also beautifies the tomb) are insufficient and irrelevant for this abiding internal defilement.[4] As opposed to Mark 7, however, there is no focus here on the heart as opposed to the outside of the body, and thus no explicit moral/ritual divide. In fact, it would appear that Matthew's Jesus is using the well-known and accepted defilement of the dead as a simile for the true defilement of the Pharisees. The version in Luke (11:44) is somewhat different, but with similar import: there, the Pharisees are compared to "unmarked tombstones, and people walk over them without realizing it." Here too there is an implicit acceptance of the requirement to mark graves, presumably for reasons of death defilement.

There are no sources from the second century which can give us a clear picture concerning Christian views of death defilement, though there are a number of possible hints. One is a passage in Aristides' *Apology* (4), which argues that the earth cannot be a god because "it is filled with the dead and becomes a repository for bodies: none of which things can that holy and venerable and blessed and incorruptible nature receive." This text certainly does not prove that Christians purified themselves after contact with the dead, but it does attest to a thoroughly negative attitude towards corpses, and their incompatibility with the sacred. Another possible hint is a mention in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* (1.71) of the miraculous whitening of tombs of Christians every year, which some have seen as evidence that marking for death impurity continued in the writer's milieu.[5] However, this may represent only the situation in the Jewish-Christian context of Pseudo-Clementine literature; furthermore, the whitening is interpreted as demonstrating that the dead were remembered by God, with death impurity not mentioned. A custom of whitening graves could no doubt continue without death impurity beliefs. Another argument which has been advanced for the continuing importance of death impurity for Palestinian Christians is that Christian burials of the second century are

[4] See McCane (2003), 70–3. For marking of tombs with lime, see *m. Maʿaś. Š.* 5:1. Many have seen the Matthean rendering as problematic, since it does not seem to recognize the impurity-marking function of whitewashing, only the beautifying. The two functions, however, do not seem to me incompatible, if the impurity of tombs is not considered as a totally negative aspect but as a separation from ordinary life; see below, p. 99. For the meaning of whitewashing as marking or as beautifying, see Lau (2012), who cites evidence that the latter was also relevant in a contemporary Jewish context.

[5] McCane (2003), 114, who cites this text as second-century evidence, though the *Recognitions* is commonly agreed to have been edited in the fourth or fifth century; only texts appearing in both the *Rec.* and the *Hom.* go back to an earlier common text, and this pericope does not.

archeologically indistinguishable from Jewish burials, indicating that "Christians interred their dead outside of the limits of human habitation…almost certainly for reasons of impurity."[6] I find this argument inconclusive, as besides the cemetery's location there is nothing about the physical aspect of Jewish burials that shows that they were considered defiling. The continuing burial in the same place does not prove anything beyond adherence to old habits: why replace a perfectly good burial area?

In short, there is no conclusive evidence as to what Christians of the second century thought or did about death defilement. Arguing from silence, Christians probably continued to do what their Jewish and Pagan neighbors did—i.e., distance the dead from what they considered to be sacred. There is no reason to think, however, that they continued to practice the details of Jewish *halakha* regarding the dead, as such observance would probably have appeared in the sources or been the object of polemics, as with other Jewish observances.

The earliest unequivocal source is from the end of the second century: Clement of Alexandria interprets death defilement symbolically, and denies its practical significance (but without polemical force):

> Wherefore…those anointed to be high priests, and kings, and prophets, were reckoned more holy. Whence He commands them not to touch dead bodies or approach the dead; not that the body was polluted (μιαροῦ τοῦ σώματος), but that sin and disobedience were incarnate, embodied (σαρκικῆς τε οὔσης καὶ ἐνσωμάτου) and dead, and therefore abominable (βδελυκτῆς).[7]

Clement's interpretation of death as sin which should be abominated is to be the standard understanding among Christian writers. But as in the food laws, here too symbolic interpretation of impurity is only one of the answers to the incompatibility between the rejection of impurity and OT laws regarding it. This interpretation, furthermore, does not explain why impurity was rejected in the first place. Third-century sources begin to answer this question.

## THE *DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM*

The earliest source with significant discussion of the question of death defilement is the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, in the context of a broad polemic against Jewish purity laws, including food prohibitions and impurity of menstruants. This source, which discusses the question directly and at some length, is frequently cited in modern scholarship as exemplifying the growing divide between Christian and Jewish attitudes towards death defilement and their practical significance, and therefore I will give it particular attention.

[6] *Idem*, 112. [7] *Strom*. 4.25.158; trans. *ANF* II.438.

In chapter 26, the *Didascalia* claims that the requirement of purification after contact with the dead has been annulled by Jesus. Christians are not obligated by this law:

> Indeed, in the second legislation, if one touches a dead man or a tomb, he must be bathed. You, however, according to the Gospel and according to the power of the holy spirit, shall be assembled even in the cemeteries (ܒܒܝܬ ܩܒܘܪ̈ܐ ܒܥܕܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ), and read the holy Scriptures, and without observance (ܒܠܐ ܡܢܗܓܐ) complete your services and your intercessions to God, and offer an acceptable eucharist, the likeness of the body of the kingdom of Christ, in your congregations and in your cemeteries and on the departures of them that sleep among you (ܒܒܝܬ ܩܒܘܪ̈ܐ ܘܥܠ ܐܬܪ̈ܟܕ̈ܝ ܕܢܡܘܣ̈ܐ ܕܒܝܢܟܘܢ)—pure bread that is prepared in fire and sanctified through an invocation—and without doubting pray and offer for those who are asleep.[8]

Being in a cemetery does not prevent offering the eucharist, prayers, or scripture readings. Indeed, this is a preferred place for such activities. Thus the conception that death defilement is incompatible with the sacred is rejected. The phrase "according to the Gospel and according to the power of the holy spirit" should be read in light of the pneumatology developed earlier in the text: a believing, baptized woman is filled with the holy spirit even while menstruating, because otherwise she would be filled with an impure spirit, as a person cannot be void of any spirit whatsoever. Therefore, she should not abstain from contact with the "works of the holy spirit", the eucharist, prayer or scriptures.[9] The same holds in the cemetery: although it is infested with impure spirits, believers should not fear to hold services there, because they are filled with the Holy Spirit and cannot become impure. The *Didascalia* adds another reason for the rejection of impurity: the believing dead are not really dead, they are only asleep and waiting for the resurrection. This was also the case with Elisha, whose bones resurrected a dead man, proving that "even when he was asleep, his body was holy and filled with the holy spirit," and therefore certainly did not defile.

In these two explanations, the *Didascalia* goes beyond postulating a rejection of the impurity laws by Jesus, and develops a theory of why the dead are not impure. Both of these explanations are relevant to believers only, not to all

[8] Vööbus (1979), II.261; trans. IV.243–4. The Latin version (Funk (1905), I.376) does not contain significant differences.

[9] Vööbus (1979), II.256; trans. IV.239. A parallel to this is found in a Tannaitic source attributed to R. Yehuda b. Bteira of Nisibis, which argues that Torah should be studied even by men with seminal emissions: "words of Torah do not become defiled, as is written, 'my words are like fire, says the Lord,' as fire does not become defiled, so words of Torah do not become defiled" (*b. Ber* 22a). In both sources, it is intimated that impurity only adheres to things of this world, and not to sacred things and words, which are beyond it. This idea is inimical to the truce worldview of defilement, in which it is precisely the sacred that should be distanced from impurity. Compare also to *Life of Adam and Eve* 6–7, where Adam says that they should not pray until their penance is complete, "since our lips are unclean."

mankind: The Holy Spirit which is in them prevents them from becoming defiled when in the cemetery, and similarly prevents them from defiling after they die, since they are not really dead. It appears that for the author of the *Didascalia* death impurity still exists—perhaps in the death of non-Christians—but in the case of Christians, it is vanquished through the action of the Holy Spirit. The centrality of pneumatology for the rejection of death impurity mirrors the role of demonology in food impurity. As true defilement is mediated through demons—impure spirits—so defilement cannot adhere to a body when the holy spirit is present.

The *Didascalia*'s rejection of impurity would seem to be valid for all Christians, with hardly any mention of special treatment of martyrs' tombs: all that is said is that the offering of the eucharist can be performed also in the cemetery, and should be offered there for the benefit of "those who sleep." These offerings are for all of the believers, and not specifically for the martyrs.[10] A comparison with a later version of this text, included in the late fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions*, demonstrates this point:

| *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26 | *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.30[11] |
|---|---|
| …be assembled even in the cemeteries, and read the holy Scriptures, and without observance complete your services and your intercessions to God, | …assemble in the cemeteries, reading the holy Scriptures, **and singing for the martyrs which are fallen asleep, and for all the saints from the** beginning **of the world, and for your brethren that are asleep in the Lord,** |
| and offer an acceptable eucharist… | and offer the acceptable eucharist… |
| …And he is not the God of the dead, but of the living. | …is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him. **Wherefore, of those that live with God, even their relics (τὰ λείψανα) are not without honour.** |
| …For this cause therefore do you approach without restraint to those who are at rest, and hold them not defiled. | …Whence you also, O bishops, and the rest, who without such observances touch the departed, ought not to think yourselves defiled. **Nor abhor their relics (τὰ τούτων λείψανα), but avoid such observances, for they are foolish.** |

The later redactor inserted mentions of martyrs and of relics as non-defiling, highly relevant to the debate on the cult of the saints at the end of the fourth century, into the earlier text, which had framed the rejection of impurity in a

[10] Elisha, brought in as an example of a non-defiling holy man, is not set as an extraordinary person but rather as proof that the Holy Spirit continues to abide in the bodies of the "sleeping" believers.

[11] Metzger, II.388–92; trans. *ANF* VII.464.

context of general contact with the dead, not with certain, specific dead. The *Didascalia* does envisage services in cemeteries as including eucharist meals, but does not state that these are preferred sites for offering as they would later become.

The *Didascalia*'s somewhat ambiguous statements concerning the degree of contact with the dead reflect the early stages of a cult of the martyrs. The earliest attestation for the venerated status of a martyr's body is probably the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, now argued to date from around 250.[12] After his death, the believers gather Polycarp's bones, "more valuable than expensive gems and more precious than gold, and put them in a suitable place" (18.2).[13] Thus at this date a martyr was commemorated by honoring his remains and their proper burial, similar to funeral practices for all honorable dead.[14] In the early third-century *Acts of Thomas*, King Mizdaeus searches after a bone of Thomas for healing his son, though the dust of his tomb proves sufficiently efficacious after it is found that the body was stolen by his disciples.[15] David Frankfurter has argued that in third-century Upper Egypt, saints' bodies were thought to convey healing powers similar to those of holy objects of traditional Egyptian religion.[16] The practices in these sources are still far from amounting to a cult of the saints: the saints' bodies are seen as sources of power and healing and their tombs are commemorated, but they are not at the center of a cult nor deemed to be the most suitable places for a eucharist offering.

The *Didascalia*'s claims that eucharist offerings should be made at tombs despite charges of impurity are seen by some as evidence that there was an active polemic on the subject, with some Christians strongly believing in death impurity, and also believing that impurity prevented the offering of eucharist among tombs.[17] However, there are a number of reasons to think that the *Didascalia* does not in fact attest to such a polemic.

The arrangement of Chapter 26 of the *Didascalia* indicates that the Christian practices at the tomb were not so innovative, certainly less so than non-purification of menstruants. In the *Didascalia*'s polemic against purity issues

[12] Moss (2010); Zwierlein (2014), 262–6 argues for an earlier date for the original text, but with the earliest revision already in 260–80.

[13] Ed. Otto Zwierlein, *Die Urfassungen der Martyria Polycarpi et Pionii und das Corpus Polycarpianum* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014); trans. Ehrman I.393. The continuation (18:3), "There, whenever we can gather together in joy and happiness, the Lord will allow us to commemorate the birthday of his martyrdom", appears only in some of the manuscripts, and the latest critical edition (Zwierlein [2014], 208–10) assigns it to a later redactor, *c*.307–12.

[14] This can be compared with the situation in third-century Africa according to Saxer (1980): "la *cura mortuorum* ne diffère pas substantiellement dans le cas de morts ordinaires et dans celui des martyrs, envers ces derniers elle ne change que d'intensité . . . le culte des martyrs dans le cadre du sacrifice eucharistique est de la même nature que le culte des morts." Tomb-side eucharist offering for the dead is found also in the *Life of Polycarp* 20, traditionally dated to the fourth century but now claimed to be a late third-century text by Stewart-Sykes (2002).

[15] *Acts of Thomas*, 170 (trans. Klijn, 250).

[16] Frankfurter (1994).

[17] Volp (2002), 250–2.

in Jewish law, rejection of concerns over menstruants' defilement takes prime place (over six pages in the Vööbus edition), with issues of death defilement, occupying less than a page, located in the middle of the discussion of menstruants. Significantly, the rejection of death defilement is not portrayed as opposed to actual Jewish practice but only to what was commanded in "the second legislation" (i.e., the Jewish laws), and its discussion is not framed as a dispute with a real protagonist. Menstruation issues, on the other hand, *are* framed as such a dispute, with the text appealing several times to the protagonist ("I say to you, O woman…"), and with actual practice referred to several times. The *Didascalia*'s integration of death defilement issues with menstruation issues is exemplified in the concluding sentence of the passage on death defilement:

> On this account then do you approach without restraint to those who rest (ܕܫܟܒ̈ܝܢ ܒܫܠܝܐ) [i.e., the dead] and you shall not declare (them) impure (ܬܛܡ̈ܝܢ), so also you shall not separate those (women) who are in the habit.[18]

The text then returns to its polemic against menstruation defilement. Thus a central role of the argument against death defilement is to buttress the argument against menstruation defilement. I would argue that in the *Didascalia*'s milieu, the rejection of death defilement was much less controversial than the rejection of menstruation defilement, and perhaps was not subject to real controversy at all.

Cultural context also makes this conclusion likely. Seen in a traditional funerary context, whether Jewish or pagan, the practices defended by the *Didascalia* are not so innovative. While Jewish prayers or Torah-readings were certainly not held regularly in cemeteries, they were also not prohibited there, and burial services included prayers and verses from scripture. Among Jews, impurity did not prevent convening at tombs, especially of prophets or well-known rabbis, though without cult.[19] Funerary and commemorative meals, which included offerings at the tomb, were common in all cultures of the region and were practiced also by Christians. They show much similarity with early eucharists at the tomb, especially as in this period many conceived of the eucharist as a special meal and not specifically as a sacrament.[20] Therefore, the *Didascalia*'s claim that observance of religious rituals at tombs is not compatible with the "second

[18] Vööbus (1979), II.262, trans. IV.244.

[19] A number of rabbinic sources witness to a custom of placing a Torah scroll on the bier as part of a rabbi's funeral: Ta-Shma (2002); Kadari (2010). Other sources for Jewish assembly at tombs of saints, especially the tombs of the Maccabees, are collected by Horbury (1998b). See, however, the downplaying of evidence for such customs by Rutgers (1998). An analysis of the literary aspect of the question is found in Ziadé (2007), 66–106.

[20] Saxer (1980), 47–53; Jensen (2008); MacMullen (2010). Most of the evidence cited by these authors is from the West, but there is also some evidence from the East which shows generally similar patterns. On the eucharist as a meal after the first century, see McGowan (1999a).

legislation's" requirement to be purified after contact with a tomb is false, and does not accord with Jewish or pagan practice. Rather, belief in death defilement required that rituals at tombs be marked as marginal and secondary to the primary rituals performed in the social and geographical center of the community, and that there be a clear separation, expressed through purification, between rituals at the tomb and rituals at the center.[21] While the ritual described in the *Didascalia* blurs the line between center and margin, it does not erase it: the offerings at the tomb are "for those who are asleep," not the central offering of the community.

If it is not a side to a polemic on practices of death defilement, why does the *Didascalia* say that eucharist offerings in cemeteries are prohibited according to Jewish Law? I believe that the rejection of death defilement is one element of its attempt to create a united and integrated realm of Christian practice opposed to Jewish practice, and thereby of Christian identity opposed to Jewish "second legislation" identity.[22] Death defilement was chosen to play a role in this text because its editors thought that it was similar to other Jewish purity laws and could therefore be of use in their wholesale rejection, and not because of its practical significance in its community.

## ORIGEN

Compared to his copious remarks on food laws (see ch. 9), Origen discusses death impurity only once, in his *Homilies on Leviticus*, in an attack on the practical Jewish understanding of death defilement laws:

> Why should one, who, for example, touches a dead animal or the body of a dead man be held to be impure? What if it is the body of a prophet? What if it is the body of a patriarch or even the body of Abraham himself? What if he touches the bones of Elijah, which raise a dead person? . . . see how unsuitable the Jewish interpretation is.[23]

Rather, the biblical text should be read symbolically, as relating to sin, or a person who sins. Origen's rejection of impurity focuses on different issues from the *Didascalia*: he does not mention the resurrection, the Holy Spirit, or Jesus' annulment of the Law. The problem with impurity is its homogeneity, its equalizing force: Origen cannot comprehend a situation in which all of the dead are equally defiled without regard to their actions while living. As he says in the *Contra Celsum*:

[21] Scheid (1984).
[22] On the *Didascalia*'s creation of an alternative to rabbinic Judaism, see Fonrobert (2001).
[23] *Hom. Lev*. 3.3.1 (Baehrens 303; trans. Barkley, 55–6).

> It is absurd (ἄτοπον) that some stones and buildings should be regarded as more pure or more impure (καθαρώτερα ἢ μιαρώτερα) than other stones and buildings because they have been built for the honour of God, or for the use of the most dishonourable and polluted bodies (ἀτιμοτάτων σωμάτων καὶ ἐναγῶν), if there is no difference between one body and another, the difference depending upon whether they are inhabited by rational or irrational beings, and by the better kind of rational beings or by the worst of men.[24]

The status of a person's body—dead or alive—cannot be isolated from his spiritual status, since the body is a receptacle for the soul. Death impurity, however, implies that all human bodies are equally defiling. A broad, absolute distinction between dead and living persons does not permit a hierarchy of bodies spanning this divide. In Origen's eyes, such homogenization is so absurd that it immediately undermines the viability of ritual impurity. The imminent possibility of resurrection reflected in the power of Elijah's bones further demonstrates that the line separating dead from living is more ambiguous than it appears, and hence that religious hierarchies should span the divide between them. For Origen, bodies have a negative or positive value which can be expressed in purity or defilement; the source for this is not the body itself, but rather the soul it houses. This is the same principle found in food impurity: true impurity has an interior source, even as it influences exterior reality. Jewish interpretation of impurity is cast as disregarding the interior and arbitrarily defiling the exterior.

It is difficult to compare Origen's view with that of the *Didascalia*, as the former is writing biblical exegesis while the latter is a guide of practice. However, Origen's immediate turn to the "very special dead," not mentioned at all by the *Didascalia*, indicates a radically different approach to the problem, which will dominate in the future.

## METHODIUS OF OLYMPUS

Methodius (d. 311) is the only early Christian author who wrote a tract expressly dedicated to issues of biblical ritual purity, and I shall therefore discuss his work briefly even though he postdates Origen. The treatise discusses the biblical dietary and death impurity laws, arguing against Jewish interpretation and advancing an allegorical reading.[25] Methodius' arguments on death impurity

[24] *Cels*. 4.59 (Marcovich 275; trans. Chadwick, 232). On the value of the body for Origen in this context, see Volp (2009). Compare Origen's claim in *Cels*. 2.69, that Jesus' burial in a "new, clean" tomb reflects his pure status and birth.

[25] The text known as *De cibis judaicis* is extant only in a Slavonic translation, translated into German by Gottlieb N. Bonwetsch, "Über die Unterscheidung der Speisen und über die junge Kuh" in *Methodius* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1917) [=*GCS* 27].

are quite different from Origen's and are more similar to the *Didascalia*. First, he argues that if impurity indeed exists, and considering that red cow ashes are no longer available,[26] then touching the holy scriptures or celebrating Passover should be forbidden; the fact that the Jews still perform these rituals shows that they are hypocrites, not practicing what they preach. As Methodius understands Jewish death impurity, impurity should be incompatible with any degree of contact with holiness, including touching the holy scriptures and the non-sacrificial celebration of Passover. These practices are quite similar to the rituals explicitly permitted by the *Didascalia* in cemeteries—reading the scriptures and eucharist; it appears that there was a common understanding of what kind of rituals are not allowed if impurity is in force.

Furthermore, claims Methodius, the laws of death defilement are almost impossible to keep, as they require frequent purifications. The Law required ashes for purification in order that with the demise of the Temple and the loss of the ashes the Jews would be forced to resort to the true purification through Christ. What is more, the carrying of Joseph's bones by Moses in the desert demonstrates that these laws were not kept.[27] These problems in the practice of the law indicate that the biblical text should be read symbolically, as saying that the death of the soul—sin—defiles the person.[28]

To these negative arguments Methodius adds positive arguments reflecting Christian views on the dead: the dead are actually purer than the living, because they cannot sin anymore; this is proved by the future resurrection, as God would not resurrect impure beings.[29] Methodius goes somewhat further than the *Didascalia* in the affirmation of death. It is not only a valid continuation of life, or a temporary "sleep" before the resurrection, but an improved status purer than life.

[26] Methodius' belief that red cow ash for purification no longer existed in his time (briefly alluded to by the *Didascalia* as well, Vööbus p. 236) runs counter to the opinion of several scholars who argue from Talmudic sources that it was used to the end of the fourth century, at least in Palestine. See above, p. 54 n. 194.

[27] *De cib*. 13 (ed. Bonwetsch, 446). Compare the Midrashic tradition on Joseph's coffin, which claims that the coffin was carried alongside the ark of the covenant (*Mekilta d'Rabbi Yišmaʿel*, Masekta d'Vayehi Bešalaḥ, Petiḥta, ed. Horovitz and Rabin, 79). The rabbis thus preferred to aggravate, rather than conceal, the supposed impurity problem. This case exemplifies the gap between what (some rabbinic) Jews thought about impurity and what Christians alleged that Jews thought about impurity. For the historical background of the midrash, see Kadari (2010).

[28] *De cib*.10.

[29] According to 1 Cor 15:42, the corrupted or perishable body becomes incorrupt or imperishable when raised. This does not, however, determine the status of the body in the interim, while in the tomb. Methodius' image for body in *De resurrectione* 1.41 is that of a temple within which grows the tree of sin; in death the tree is uprooted and the temple falls; when resurrected, the temple is reassembled according to the original plan (an expansion of Rom 6:7: "anyone who has died has been freed from sin"). Thus the body in the tomb is purer than the living body. See Bynum (1995), 68–71.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND CHRISTIAN PRAXIS

There is no material evidence that Christian burials were significantly different from non-Christian burials prior to the spread of the cult of the martyrs.[30] Christian burials were still situated outside of the towns, like their pagan or Jewish contemporaries, and there are no architectural signs of the eucharist being celebrated at the martyrs' tombs before the end of the fourth century.[31] Christian funerals were doubtless different in their liturgy and perhaps in an optimistic attitude about the fate of the dead; but this does not necessarily entail any practical attitude towards death defilement. Thus it is difficult to know if the theoretical discussions rejecting defilement, examined in the preceding pages, were accompanied by a decisive change in practice. Certainly the question did not preoccupy the minds of contemporary Christians to any great extent, judging by the small number of discussions. The paucity of evidence could be interpreted in two opposite ways—either that Christians did not purify themselves after contact with the dead, in accordance with the rejection of Jewish law and pagan religion, and therefore there was little comment upon it; or that they did purify themselves like their contemporaries, but that the issue was not considered important enough to justify polemic as long as the purification was not of a specifically Jewish or pagan character. Both answers could be true, in different places and situations. The work of Eric Rebillard, which has shown that funerals and cemeteries were under the control of the family and not the church, may indicate that the latter option of continuing purification practice is likely, as families may have been more traditional and less influenced by theoretical anti-Jewish arguments.[32]

However, there is a third option. Even if Christians believed that death defiled, this belief may not have had much practical meaning, since they lacked temples requiring purification before entry. A general feeling of repugnance of the dead, arising from basic human biological and psychological traits, probably exists in almost all societies; however, its articulation in ritual is not automatic, and it requires a well-structured spatial and social world.[33] Christians in the third century had sacred objects, but these were certainly not as articulated in space as the pagan temples.[34] As a result, beliefs of death impurity could rarely be expressed in the usual ritual way, i.e., the prohibition of entering sacred space while defiled. The situation is quite similar to that of the Jews, who also lacked a spatial sacred center after the destruction of the temple, leading to a gradual decline of defilement rules. Christians perceived corpses in general (but not the

[30] "there is no trace of a specifically Christian funerary architecture before the time of Constantine": Ward-Perkins (1966), 23.

[31] Snyder (2003), 172–3.

[32] Rebillard (2009). I thank Prof. Rebillard for his suggestions concerning this chapter.

[33] See Uro (2013).

[34] Sotinel (2005).

martyrs) as repugnant, as will be seen from a number of fourth-century sources, but did not have a spatial ritual system to articulate this repugnance.[35] When such a spatial system did develop in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, it was already centered upon martyrs' tombs and therefore could hardly foster rituals of death impurity.

## CONCLUSIONS

We shall conclude this chapter by comparing Christian attitudes towards death defilement to the attitudes towards food defilement. On both food and death, the basic attitude is that Jesus annulled the Jewish purity laws; references to ritual purity in the Bible should be interpreted as relating to moral issues, thus dismantling the ritual aspect of defilement while maintaining the biblical text. Discussions of death defilement refer only to Jewish, and not to pagan beliefs in death defilement, demonstrating that the debate on death defilement was part of the broader polemic with Judaism on purification.

Nevertheless, there is a prominent difference between the issues. As opposed to food impurity, which was discussed intensively in earliest Christianity and continued to draw attention for centuries, no explicit mention of death impurity is made in the first two centuries, and later discussions are undeveloped. There are a number of reasons that food continued to be central in Christian discussions of purification while death defilement did not: First, as mentioned earlier, purification from death would not have been important for Christians because they did not have temples to enter, and churches were not yet spatially well-defined. Second, food laws had a central role in the construction of Christian versus Jewish identities following the interpretation of Jesus' sayings on purity as relating to food laws. Third, the existence of Christian dietary observances required a theoretical effort to elucidate the difference between Christian and Jewish approaches to food purity, which was not required in the case of death defilement. In the latter case, although unarticulated vestiges such as feelings of disgust remained, a coherent system expressed in ritual did not exist. While in food laws there was a complex negotiation of the idea of impurity through demons or the conscience, in the case of death, impurity was completely rejected, and hardly merited attention from the writers of the period.

As a consequence of the collapse of death defilement as a symbolic system, it could not be significantly used in inter-religious debate, because there was no common language with which to argue. As Origen shows, biblical death

[35] This lack of ritual articulation may also have led to a weakening of the beliefs themselves: a person who rarely purifies himself after contact with the dead will probably start to downplay defilement, even if he has a general belief that it exists.

defilement could not be understood by Christian writers but as an abstract metaphor for sin or disgust, disconnected from any ritual reality. This led to such miscomprehensions as the idea that Jews try not to bury their dead for fear of defilement. Food purity rules, in contrast, were interpreted in a variety of ways, reflecting some comprehension of how Jews understood food as a ritual symbol.

# Part III

# Roots of a New Paradigm: The First Two Centuries

# 5

# Baptism as Purification in Early Christian Texts

In Christianity, baptism is a series of actions centering upon being washed in water in the name of Jesus, serving for initiation into the Christian community. Only through the transformation of baptism could a person join the community and take part in its most sacred rites, especially the eucharist. But what happened in baptism? How did washing in water and the acceptance of the Christian God change a non-Christian into a Christian?

Writers from Paul onwards sought to explain the symbolism of this ritual and to understand its significance for the person undergoing it. Writers of the first centuries explained and developed baptism through many concepts and metaphors: regeneration or rebirth, sanctification, purification, forgiveness of sins, casting in fire and sealing. In this chapter I will focus on the pervasive conceptualization of baptism as a purification of the person, and on what this conceptualization entails for the Christian understandings of sin and defilement. While I do not claim that purification was always the most important interpretation of baptism, it was a highly prevalent image among writers of the first centuries, making baptism a prime site for examining purity discourse. It is surprising, therefore, that there are hardly any studies dedicated to the question of baptism as purification in the second and third centuries.[1]

While in the NT the purificatory aspect of baptism is seldom mentioned, in the much more systematic and extensive writings of the following two centuries it has a central role. This can be seen both in the terms and figures writers use to describe baptismal change and in the ideas expressed through such language.

Terms and idioms expressing purification or washing of dirt and defilement were commonly used in the second and third centuries to describe baptism. "Washing" (*λουτρόν*) is a common name for baptism among Christian writers, drawing on 1 Cor 6:11 and Acts 22:16; writers frequently suggest that

[1] Frățilă (2001) discusses this subject, but her focus is on texts postdating the fourth century. The ritually-oriented survey of Strecker (2011) provides some corrective to the lacuna.

baptism washes a person clean of sin.[2] Words of the roots καθάρ- and ἁγν- are frequently associated with baptism, at times accompanying the description of baptism as a washing.[3] Writers also use more developed images for purification through baptism, such as the removal of blindness, whitening of clothes or person, and the shedding of dirty garments.[4] Many illustrations of baptism make use of passages in the Hebrew Bible speaking of purification of lepers,[5] or of purification as part of the temple cult.[6] Others cite prophetic passages speaking of purification from sin,[7] or expand on stories interpreted as images of purification, such as the crossing of the Red Sea or Noah's ark.[8]

The importance of the purificatory dimension of baptism in second- and third-century writings goes beyond the lexical level, and is supported also by the description of baptism's function and meaning. First, baptism's central component is dipping or sprinkling in water. Washing is perhaps the most pervasive image of purification, as it clearly enunciates the idea of the shedding of negative aspects in order to uncover the basic, unadulterated core of the object or person. Furthermore, as early Christians also knew, washing in water was the central purification ritual in Judaism and in Greco-Roman religions. The purificatory quality of washing in water in Judaism was clearly in the background of John's baptism, which the Gospels describe as a precursor for the baptism of Jesus, and, presumably, of later Christians. Second, baptism was thought to remove negative elements from the person: it absolved past sins, an action frequently described as purification, and sources from the second century speak of baptism expelling impure demons, the fire of lust, corporeality, or evil in general. Third, baptism was the prerequisite for participation in the eucharist offering, which was commonly seen as a sacrifice; a eucharist was typically offered immediately after baptism. Purification preceded sacrifice in most ancient religions (indeed this was the typical setting for purification), and therefore understanding baptism as a kind of purification would be highly

[2] Justin, *Dial.* 14; Clement, *Paed.* 1.6; Origen, *Hom. Ex.* 5.5, *Comm. Rom.* 5.9.11; Tertullian, *Bapt.* 4; *Ps.-Clementine Rec.* 4.32, 6.8; Cyprian, *Ep.* 70 (69).1.3, 69 (70), 74 (73).5.4, *Hab. virg.* 23; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 7.5.5. See Ysebaert (1962), 64–78.

[3] Justin, *Dial.* 14, 86; Irenaeus, *Epid.* 41; Clement, *Ecl.* 7; Origen, *Hom. Ex.* 11.7, *Comm. Jo.* 6.33 [17].166–167, *Hom. Lev.* 6.2. For other references see Lampe (1961), 21, 682, 685–6 (s.v. ἁγνίζω 1; ἁγνισμός 1; καθαιρῶ B3; καθάρσιος C; κάθαρσις A1).

[4] Removing blindness: Clement, *Paed.* 1.6; whitening: Origen, *Hom. Jer.* 11.6.3; removal of dirty clothes: Clement, *Paed.* 1.6.32; Origen, *Hom. Ex.* 11.7; *Ps.-Clementine Rec.* 1.69. The symbolism of nudity and clothing in baptism and their connection to purification have been studied extensively. See Smith (1966); Layton (1978); Filoramo (1999).

[5] Leprosy: Irenaeus, frg. 34; Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 33.5. For leprosy in later patristic exegesis, see Swanson (2004), 234–70.

[6] Clement, *Strom.* 3.12.82.6; Cyprian, *Ep.* 69.12.

[7] Favorites are Is 1:16 (Justin, *1 Apol.* 61), Ezek 36:25 (Cyprian, *Ep.* 69, 70) and Ps 51:7 (Origen, *Catena Fragments of Commentary on John*, 36). Later writers string these and others in catenae, e.g., Didymus of Alexandria, *Trin. PG* 39:712–714; Theodoret, *Affect.* 7:30.

[8] Noah's ark: 1 Pet 3; Tertullian, *Bapt.* 8; Cyprian, *Ep.* 69.12. Red sea: Tertullian, *Bapt.* 9; Origen, *Hom. Ex.* 5.5; *Hom. Jos.* 5.9; *Hom. Cant.* 2.6. For both images, see Daniélou (1960).

suitable for the religious context of early Christianity. Other sources speak of baptism as a preparation of the person for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and also here purification is an apt image.

The first, introductory section of this chapter is an exposition of baptismal practice and symbolism as expressed in the NT documents. After this I shall investigate what baptismal purification meant for second- and third-century writers, and the purity discourse implicated in the theology, phenomenology of baptism in these writings. For all of these writers, baptismal purity discourse is essentially a question of how sin can be removed through ritual. This question clusters around two issues: the relationship with Jewish purity conceptions and the relationship between inner and outer purification, i.e., the understanding of human nature implied by the ritual.

## BAPTISM AND PURIFICATION IN THE FIRST CENTURY: FROM PAUL TO ACTS

### The Pauline Epistles

The Pauline epistles are the earliest texts in which immersion is linked with the name of Jesus and with entrance to the Christian communities. Paul did not speak of the ritual of baptism itself, and appeared to take it for granted. His discussions were dedicated mostly to developing the initiatory symbolism of baptism: baptism as conveyer of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13), as "baptism into Christ" (Gal. 3:27), as the formation of one body (1 Cor 12:13), and as burial with Christ and baptism into his death (Rom 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). Purification—whether of body or of sins—is never explicitly mentioned by Paul in connection to baptism, and terms of purity are not used to describe the ritual. While other writers of the first and second centuries emphasize that initiation into the pure and sacred group is possible only with or following purification from sins incurred in the past, this is not the focus of the Pauline discussions. Thus, in Rom 6:3–4, Paul speaks of death of the sinful body and freedom from sin in baptism, without mentioning purification. In 1 Cor 6:9–11, it is said that members of the community used to be sinners in the past, but they were "washed (or: washed clean, ἀπελούσασθε), sanctified (ἡγιάσθητε)…justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."[9] If indeed this is intended as a reference to baptism,[10] clear terms of purification appear to be neglected (though this depends on how ἀπελούσασθε is understood), and the focus is rather on sanctification.[11]

[9] For baptism/immersion in God for purification, compare *m. Yoma* 8.9.

[10] Ferguson (2009), 150, believes it is; Fee (1987), 246–8 is less certain.

[11] But see Hartman (1997), 63–6. Newton (1985), 82, argues that Paul is here "clearly speaking … of a cleansing of past transgressions", and Petersen (2010), 3, sees "washed clean" (as, e.g., in the

Some passages in the pseudo- and deutero-Pauline epistles contain additional hints of baptismal purification and the connection between purification and sanctification. Ephesians 5:25–7 (also discussed below, p. 170) represents Jesus as making the church "holy (ἁγιάσῃ)" and "purifying her with the washing of water by the word (καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι)." Here, too, the reference to baptism is unclear; even assuming that actual ritual baptism is being referred to, it is not the focus of the verse, but is rather being used as an image for a purification of the church as a whole. Nevertheless, the author appears to assume that a ritual of purifying by washing is well-known to the readers. Sanctification and purification from metaphorical blemishes are essentially combined: they appear to be two aspects of the same process or act, and both a result of baptism. A later passage mentioning washing, but not purification, is Titus 3:5–6: "he saved us . . . according to his mercy, through the washing of rebirth and renewal (λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως) by the Holy Spirit which he poured out upon us."

The Pauline writings are therefore the earliest witnesses to the transformation of what was primarily a ritual of purification (whether for sin or for bodily defilement) into a ritual of initiation as well. In the words of Wayne A. Meeks: "by making the cleansing rite alone bear the whole function of initiation . . . the Christian groups created something new. For them the bath becomes a permanent threshold between the 'clean' group and the 'dirty' world, between those who have been initiated and everyone who has not."[12]

In this basic transformation, an action which in Judaism and other religions of the Empire was a preparatory ritual *before* entrance into a holy space or group became in Paul a ritual *of* entrance into the group: a ritual of sanctification with overtones of purification.[13] As Meeks notes, this sanctification is permanent, a total change of personal status which cannot be reversed. Baptism is not a personal matter with short-term consequences, but a public, permanent transformation, aligning the baptizand with spiritual fault-lines of cosmic proportions. From being allied with the evil demons and idol-worshipers, under the power of Sin, he or she is now in the camp of the angels of God and of the saints; from the defilements of the day-to-day world to that of the primal purity of Adam in paradise and the purity of the soon-to-arrive eschaton.[14]

New Jerusalem Bible) as a more apt translation: "the ritual is said to have cleansed the participants from the state of being that existed prior to the ritual."

[12] Meeks (2003), 155. See further Stroumsa (1999), 268–81; Betz (2004), 84–118; for a discussion of the relationship between purification and initiation, see Petersen (2010).

[13] It is possible that Paul or John the Baptist were following here the custom of immersion for proselytes, according to *m. Pes.* 8.8, which appears to date this custom to the Second Temple period. However, it is disputed whether this *mishna* speaks of proselyte immersion at all. Later texts (*b. Yeb.* 46, *y. Qidd.* 64d) raise this question again, but the upshot of these discussions is that there was no consensus on the absolute requirement of immersion. See Hayes (2002), 116–22.

[14] See Newton (1985), 79–97; Carter (2002), 63–77, 175–80; Filoramo (1999).

As a result, while in the Hebrew Bible purity was distinct from sacrality, for Paul the pure is almost synonymous with the sacred and the profane or common with the defiled, creating a much simpler dualist system. Moreover, the place of sin in the community had changed. Rather than regularly encompassing both sinners and non-sinners, pure and impure, the community includes only the pure and the sacred. The only possible morally correct act of a person outside this community is to enter it, and thus to shed all his or her sins, these being a direct result and reflection of the former life "outside." Though defilement can at times enter the community this is the exception not the rule.

## The Gospels and Acts

The references in the Gospels to baptism are to John's baptism, to the baptism of Jesus himself by John (Mark 1:9–11; Matt 3:13–17; Luke 3:21–2; John 1:32–3), or to Jesus' commandment to the apostles to baptize others (Matt 28:18–20).

Josephus described John's baptism as "a purification of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior."[15] The Gospels' description is rather different: it has significant eschatological overtones, and focuses on baptism as purification from sin, rather than of the body. John's call was for "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (*μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*)," and the people "confessing (*ἐξομολογούμενοι*) their sins, were baptized by him in the Jordan River" (Mark 1:4–5, Matt 3:6, Luke 3:3). According to this description, immersion itself was not primarily for ascetic purity (in spite of John's ascetic behavior), neither for bodily purity of the kind described by the Torah, but rather for the forgiveness of sin. Furthermore, there is no hint as to the function of the physical washing in water, which is only highlighted in comparison to the more effective baptism "by fire and the Holy Spirit," to be performed by Jesus.

Jesus' baptism by John is not described as a baptism for purification, but as the site for the descending of the Holy Spirit upon him. However, since John's baptisms were for the forgiveness of sins, it is implied that Jesus' baptism by John, as well as Jesus' future baptisms in the Holy Spirit, are also linked to this function.[16] The baptisms to be performed by Jesus will be acts of judgment and purgation (Matt 3:11). Jesus himself links the fire he came to cast upon the earth and the baptism he must undergo (Luke 12:49–50). Instead of the believers being purified from sins, in the eschaton the world itself will be purified by the destruction of the sinners.

In the book of Acts, baptism appears frequently as an act of conversion, with the focus on the baptizands receiving the Holy Spirit and of baptism as an

[15] See above, p. 53.

[16] For a discussion of the place of repentance in Jesus' baptism, see Evans (2002), 61–5.

action of the Holy Spirit.[17] Forgiveness of sin and repentance both appear explicitly: "and Peter said to them: Repent (μετανοήσατε), and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38). This passage does not, however, use terms of purification, or explain how baptism, repentance, or both bring about the forgiveness of sins.[18] Peter's exhortation echoes that of John, but adds to it the name of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Elsewhere (22:16), baptism in Jesus' name is said to wash away sins (ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας). Forgiveness of sins is more central in Acts than in Paul's writings, but the gift of the Holy Spirit still receives more attention. Paul (in Acts and in the Epistles), did not mention the need for repentance as part of baptism, while for Peter it appears to be an essential prerequisite. On numerous occasions, belief in Jesus and repentance are demanded from the audience, usually before baptism.[19]

## Hebrews and 1 Peter

Relative to the Pauline Epistles, the Gospels, and Acts, the (probably later) texts Hebrews and 1 Peter put a much greater emphasis on baptismal purification. Chapters 8–10 of the Epistle to the Hebrews construct an elaborate typology based on the Jerusalem temple cult, portraying Jesus as the true and perfect atoning High Priest and sacrifice. The conclusions drawn from this typology include what may be a description of baptism: "since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (ῥεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς καὶ λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ)" (10:21–2).[20] The believers are called to enter the temple of which Jesus is high priest, but to do that they must first purify themselves, through a "sprinkling" (probably an allusion to Jesus' blood—see Heb 9:19–22, 12:24) of the heart as well as washing in water for the body.[21] These actions are probably a typology of the consecration of priests as

[17] Ferguson (2009), 166–85.

[18] The verb ἀφίημι with the noun ἁμαρτία are commonly used in the New Testament to denote forgiveness of sins, Mark 1:4, 2:5; Matt 26:28; Luke 1:77, 3:3, 11:4, 24:47, Acts 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18; Col 1:14; the terms appear in the LXX in this way too, though much less commonly. The image behind the usage is a financial one of the forgiveness of [the debt of] sins; as a creditor can forfeit his right to the debt, God can do the same. See Anderson (2009).

[19] Acts 8:12; 10:43; 14:23; 16:31.

[20] See Hartman (1997), 123–6; Ferguson (2009), 188; Byrskog (2011).

[21] The idea that sacrifices are responsible for inner purification while water purifies the body, and that both are required, is explicitly stated by Philo; see above, pp. 52–3. A comparison with Ez 36:25–6, which is clearly in the background here, is enlightening: "I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be pure from all your defilements, and from all your idols I will purify you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you." For Ezekiel the eschaton will be

described in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8, where they are sprinkled with blood and washed in water, thus representing baptism as a consecration of the believers. The passage in Hebrews does not clarify the relation between the washing of the body and the sprinkling of the heart: does the pure water also affect the heart? What exactly is washed from the body?

The First Epistle of Peter, on the other hand, sharply differentiates inner and outer purification in baptism: "Baptism … saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the flesh (σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου) but as an appeal (ἐπερώτημα) to God for a good conscience (συνειδήσεως), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (3:21).[22] The real efficacy of baptism according to 1 Peter is moral (perhaps a request that past sins would be annulled, though the wording here is ambiguous); clearly, baptism was seen as similar enough to physical purification to require a distinction between them. Both in Hebrews and in 1 Peter, συνείδησις (in Hebrews together with the heart) is identified as the internal faculty which is purified, opposed more or less sharply to the external body washed in baptism. This reminds us of the Pauline usage of συνείδησις to denote the faculty which may be defiled by food offered to idols (1 Cor 8:7; above, pp. 69–70).

## Summary

Most of the texts in this section, probably of the first century CE, rarely use explicit terms of purification when relating to baptism. Baptism was seen primarily as a ritual in which the person was transformed and became part of the Christian community. However, one of the conceptualizations for this transformation was the removal of sins and the taint of the participation in non-Christian communities and cults from the baptizand.

The role of the physical act of washing in water and its relationship with the purification from sin remains ambiguous, though some passages remind the reader of the non-importance of external relative to internal purification. If the demarcating line between bodily purity and purity from sin is blurred in the late Second Temple period texts, in the NT texts on baptism it is non-existent:

marked by purification from sin and inner renewal; though the renewal is directed at the interior heart, (metaphorical) water purification pertains to the person as a whole, not only the body. Cf. Jas 4:7–8: "Draw near to God . . . cleanse (καθαρίσατε) your hands, you sinners, and purify (ἁγνίσατε) your hearts, you double-minded (δίψυχοι);" here sin is situated in the hands as well as the heart and mind.

[22] RSV translation; many translate differently: "as a pledge of a good conscience towards God." The latter translation is less conducive to an interpretation of baptism as purification. However the translation of ἐπερώτημα as "appeal" appears to be philologically simpler, and is appropriate in the context. Commentators who defend this translation and therefore connect the verse with purification from sin include Schreiner (2003), 196; Grudem (1988), 163.

the ritual action of washing in water purifies sins, even though more volitional dimensions, such as repentance and invoking God's name, are required as well.

## BAPTISMAL PURITY DISCOURSE IN THE SECOND AND EARLY THIRD CENTURIES

### Jewish purifications, Christian baptism

The *Didache* speaks of baptism as follows (7):

> But with respect to baptism, baptize as follows. Having said all these things in advance, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in living water (ὕδατι ζῶντι). But if you do not have running water, baptize in some other water. And if you cannot baptize in cold water, use warm. But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But both the one baptizing and the one being baptized should fast before the baptism, along with some others if they can. But command the one being baptized to fast one or two days in advance.[23]

The *Didache* says little on theory and focuses on baptismal practice, which can be summed up in three points: (1) Baptism should be performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; (2) it should be preceded by recitation or study of the "Two Ways" text which comes before this passage (*Did.* 1–6), as well as by a fast of the baptizer, the baptizand, and the community; (3) the water used should follow precise (but flexible) provisions.

The second point demonstrates that suitable preparations were required. The objective of fasting is not clarified. It could be seen as an act of personal penance and purification, but the call for a fast of the community as well does not accord with this interpretation.[24] There are a number of alternatives: the fast marks the gravity with which the ritual should be approached; it reflects the first step in the incorporation of the baptizand into the community, all now participating in the same ritual; or it creates a break between food eaten before and after the conversion.[25] The requirement to study the "Two Ways" document is more informative. Baptism does not only require general faith in Christ, but also assent to a clearly defined moral code; it is intimately connected to an understanding of the distinction of the "way of life" as opposed to the "way of death," and to a conscious decision to recognize the validity of this knowledge and to choose the correct way of life.[26] Baptism is thus a ritual aspect of a strictly binary system which divides the world into good and evil.

[23] Ehrman I.428–9. [24] *Contra* Mitchell (1995), 251.

[25] Draper (2000), 135–6; Milavec (2003), 253–8.

[26] See Mitchell (1995), 250. Rordorf (1996a) demonstrates that while the Two Ways document was originally an independent text, it was already joined by an early-second-century editor to the

The third point concerns the water itself. The *Didache* requires living water (ὕδατι ζῶντι), subject to availability. Living water (מים חיים) is mentioned in the Torah and the Mishna as an element in certain purification rituals; the classification of various kinds of waters for purification—living water (flowing water from a natural source) being the best, standing water less so, and aspersion as the lowest grade—is found in the Mishna, and the *Didache* is clearly part of this tradition.[27] However, the role of living water here is to be connected also to its symbolism of regeneration and fertility, expressed for example in Zechariah 14, as well as true wisdom and the Holy Spirit, found in many closely contemporary texts.[28]

The water requirements demonstrate the significance of ritual detail for the *Didache*'s author. At the same time, they show that the community was willing to compromise, leading several scholars to see here greater leniency concerning ritual matters compared to rabbinic Judaism.[29] In my opinion, however, it is difficult to say that the *Didache* was more lenient than contemporary Jewish groups, because it is not clear to what extent living water was required in contemporary rituals. The usual method of purification (from the defilement of death, menstruation, semen etc.) according to rabbinic and Qumranic sources was by immersion in a standing body of water (a *mikveh*) coming from a natural source, not in flowing water, while the term מים חיים is used only for flowing spring water. The importance of this method is corroborated by the ubiquity in Palestine of ritual baths built to contain standing water. According to the Tannaitic *halakha*, such water would *not* have been termed "living water";[30] this term was used only for water required in purification of the defilement of abnormal genital discharges (*zav*), as part of the leper's purification ritual, and for the preparation of the solution used for purification from death defilement. Thus there is no evidence from rabbinic or Qumranic texts that "living water" was used for the regular, day-to-day purification of genital discharges.[31]

ritual manual on baptism as a catechesis. Rordorf (1996b) traces the connections between the Two Ways motif and baptism in early Christian literature, concluding that Two Ways texts were commonly used as pre-baptismal catecheses.

[27] Lev 14:5–51; Num 19:17; *m. Miqw*. 1.

[28] John 4:10, 7:37; Rev 22:1; *Sib. Or*. 4.165; *Odes Sol*. 11.6; Ignatius, *Rom*. 7.3. See Daniélou (1958); Draper (2000), 143–4; Jones (2007); Miller (2015), 137–46.

[29] Mitchell (1995), 252; van de Sandt (2002), 240–1.

[30] See *Sifra* Metzora, Parshat Zabim 3–5; *m. Miqw*. 1.8; *t. Zabim* 3.1–3; *t. Parah* 9; 11Q19 45.16.

[31] This runs counter to the opinion of Mitchell (1995), 252–3; Milavec (2003), 262; Lawrence (2006), 84–5, 165–7; Jensen (2010), 133; and others, who state living water was used for common purification or for proselyte immersion. The sole exception is later: in *y. Ber*. 3.4 (27a) Rabbi Yannai (first half of the third century) says concerning immersion for semen impurity, "some are stringent and some lenient, and the stringent shall live a good, long life. [The lenient wash in drawn water, the stringent in living water]". The similarity to the *Didache* here, in both the requirements and the flexibility, is manifest; the bracketed sentence, however, appears only on the margins in the Leiden MS, 13r. For a similar argument relating to *P. Oxy*. 840, see Miller (2015), 110.

Greek Jewish sources may provide a different angle on this question. *Joseph and Aseneth* has Aseneth washing hands and face in "living water" before Joseph accepts her as a wife (as part of conversion?); Philo speaks of Moses' consecration of priests in "the purest and most living spring water"; and Josephus has the leper wash in "spring water (πηγαίων ὑδάτων)".[32] All of these cases are not of common purification rituals, and the first two are apparently rituals of consecration as well as purification. This may provide a link to the *Didache*'s call for living water in baptism as a ritual of both purification and consecration.

The *Didache*'s call for living water as a default option may therefore reflect a more stringent position than that known from other Jewish sources, even if the other possibilities allowed (warm water and aspersion) reflect a lenient position. Thus it cannot be said categorically that the *Didache* is more lenient than contemporary rabbinic *halakha*; rather, it shows a strong preference for living water combined with a more flexible stance towards ritual details than the Mishna. Running water continued to be the preferred option for baptisteries in the first three centuries, and thus characterizes the baptismal ritual of various second- and third-century Christian groups more than the purification rituals of contemporary Jewish communities.[33] The *Didache*'s requirement of living water may therefore have reflected a belief that baptism achieves a higher degree of purification than that Jews achieve through their rituals, and also better expressed the symbolism of baptism as a new birth and as a reception of heavenly knowledge.[34]

The only theoretical development of the role of baptism in the *Didache* follows a description of the eucharist offering: "But let no one eat or drink of your eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, 'Give not that which is holy to the dogs.' " As Huub van de Sandt has demonstrated, the saying equates the eucharist to the Jerusalem temple sacrifices, which could only be eaten by pure Jews; the eating of temple sacrifices by dogs was considered a grave profanation in Qumran and in early rabbinic sources, and here the dogs are a metaphor for the unbaptized. The *Didache*'s understanding here of what occurs in baptism again reflects a

[32] *Jos. Asen*. 14.15; Philo, *Mos*. 2.143; *Jos. Ap*. 1.282. The Aramaic targums always render מים חיים as מי מבוע, i.e., spring water, rather than מיא חיא or the like. This may be contrasted with the Peshitta, which uses מיא חיא in Lev 15:13.

[33] Jensen (2010), 132–4.

[34] See sources in note 28 above, and *T. Levi* 8 (in lines extant in the Greek but not in the Aramaic fragments from Qumran, and therefore possibly a Christian interpolation); *Barn*. 11; Justin, *Dial*. 14, 69, 114; Irenaeus, *Haer*. 3.17.2; Clement, *Strom*. 7.104.5; Origen, *Comm. Jo*. 13, *Fr. Luc*. 84; *Trad. Ap*. 21; *P. Oxy*. 840, ll. 44–5. "Living water" or "running water" in connection to baptism is common in Jewish-Christian sources: *Ps.-Clementine Hom*. 11.26; *Epistle of Peter to James* 1; Epiphanius, *Pan*. 2.30.4, 30.17.4 (concerning the Ebionites) as well as in Gnostic sources: Hippolytus, *Haer*. 5.27; *Ap. John* 5; *Gos. Phil*. 75. 21–24; *Apoc. Adam* 84; *Acts Thom*. 52, and is central in Mandaic religion.

strictly binary worldview, in which ideas of change of status and purification merge: it transforms the person from a defiled "dog" to someone pure and holy, fit for eating the holy sacrifice. Baptism is thus both conversion and purification.

While no direct answers are provided to the questions of interest here—what is being purified in baptism, and how this occurs—the required preparations demonstrate that a moral transformation is expected. This contents of this transformation are detailed in the "two ways" code, and include a broad range of ritual and social precepts. Furthermore, the *Didache* is a testimony to the way Jewish ritual terminology was used, probably in a Jewish-Christian milieu, to describe and define baptism. The choice of images ("living water," "dogs") expanded the symbolic valence of the new ritual beyond purification to evoke a binary worldview of good and evil, while retaining a strong link to the Jewish roots of purification rituals.

Other texts of the second century explicitly contrast Jewish and Christian washing rituals. According to the *Epistle of Barnabas*, only Christian rituals grant forgiveness of sins: "it is written about the water that Israel will not at all accept the baptism that brings forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν), but will create something in its place (οἰκοδομήσουσιν) for themselves" (11.1). The object of "create" is not clear; textually, it links to the "cisterns of death" opposed to the "waters of life," both mentioned later in the passage. Barnabas here may be opposing baptism as the true purifying ritual with the rituals of the Jerusalem temple; his impetus for this may be contemporary hopes among the Jewish community for the restoration of the temple.[35] Jewish rituals are marked as a human creation as opposed to the divine source of baptism.

Developing the same prooftexts as *Barnabas*, Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* also opposes the spiritual and moral purification of baptism to the physical purification of Jewish rituals:[36]

> We have believed through the baptism of repentance (μετανοίας) and knowledge (γνώσεως) of God, which was instituted for the sins of the people of God, as Isaiah testifies, and we know that that same baptism which he announced, and which alone can purify (καθαρίσαι) penitents, is the water of life. The wells which you have dug for yourselves are broken and useless. For, of what value is that baptism which cleanses only the flesh and body (τὴν σάρκα καὶ μόνον τὸ σῶμα φαιδρύνει)? Baptize your souls from anger, avarice, jealousy, and hatred; then the body will be pure (καθαρόν).[37]

Justin's first step is to call Jewish washing rituals "baptism," allowing a comparison with Christian baptism. Jewish washings, performed in wells of standing

[35] See citation of 16.7 (below, p. 121), with Paget (1994), 154–7; Ferguson (2002); for a differing opinion, see Schwartz (1992).

[36] For more on Justin's approach to baptismal purification, see below, pp. 121–3.

[37] *Dial.* 14; cf. *1 Apol.* 62.

water, purify only the body and are therefore of no value, while Christian baptism is a purification of the soul from various vices in the "water of life," which then leads automatically to a purification of the body as well.[38] Ambiguity is retained on how the vices and sins are removed—does this happen through repentance or does immersion in the name of God remove them? And if through repentance, why is immersion needed at all? In light of the anti-ritual stance Justin is promoting against Jewish religion, downplaying the washing of the body in baptism is a convenient move.

Probably as a response to claims that the baptism is no different from pagan purification rituals, Justin explains in his *First Apology* that the demons (i.e., the pagan gods), hearing Isaiah's prophecies on washing in water and repentance, caused their followers to sprinkle themselves with water before sacrifice and to immerse before entering temples.[39] This was of course, for Justin, an erroneous and even malicious understanding of the prophecies, which truly referred to Christian baptism. Though Justin does not stress the point of physical versus spiritual washing here, it is clearly implied.

Clement of Alexandria sees Jewish washings for purity after sexual relations as an image of baptism, and as superseded by baptism:

> But the providence of God as revealed by the Lord does not order now, as it did in the past, that after sexual intercourse a man be baptized (βαπτίζεσθαι). For there is no need for the Lord to make believers do this after intercourse since we trust that by one baptism he has washed them clean (ἀπολούσας) for every such occasion, as also he has included (περιλαβών) in one baptism the many of Moses. In the past the law commanded baptism after the emission of the generative seed because it was foretelling our regeneration by speaking of fleshly birth, not because it held human birth as an abomination (βδελυσσόμενος).[40]

The permanent purification of baptism supersedes washings for purity after intercourse. Washings for purity were prescribed as a prophecy that regeneration would require washing, and not due to bodily defilement. Nevertheless, Clement does not say that they should not have been practiced in the past, and indeed baptism "washes clean…for every such encounter," indicating that it has a role in purification of the defilement of intercourse, which otherwise must be dispensed with through "many washings."[41] As opposed to Justin, Clement does not denigrate Jewish washing rituals, or describe them as solely physical. This relatively conciliatory attitude to Jewish washing rituals is reminiscent of Clement's understanding of the Jewish dietary laws (above, pp. 89–90) as part of an ascetic project.

[38] See Hirshman (1996), 55–9; and see the similar fragment of Epicharmus (fifth century BCE, fr. 269): "if you have a pure mind, you're pure in all your body."

[39] 1 Apol. 62. Graf (2010), 102–5.

[40] *Strom*. 3.12.82.6–83.1.

[41] For further discussion of Clement's views on purification from sexual intercourse, see below, pp. 174–7.

*P. Oxy. 840* is an enigmatic gospel fragment, describing a dispute taking place in the Jerusalem temple between Jesus and Levi, a high priest, on baptism and water purification. Levi argues that Jesus and his disciples should not enter the temple which is a "pure place," nor view the "holy vessels" without first washing, bathing their feet, and changing clothes, as he himself did. Jesus retorts that though the priest performed these actions, he is nevertheless defiled:

> Woe unto you, O blind ones, who do not see! You have washed yourself in these running waters where dogs and pigs have wallowed (or: are cast) night and day, and you have cleansed and wiped the outside skin which the prostitutes and flute-girls anoint, which they wash, and wipe, and make beautiful for human desire; but inwardly these women are full of scorpions and every wickedness. But I and my disciples, who you say have not bathed, we have bathed in waters of eternal life, which come down from the God of Heaven.[42]

The dating of this fragment is controversial. Some, who see in the text a faithful portrayal of first-century *halakha* and interests, accept the text's own testimony that it is a first-century dispute between the Jesus movement and its opponents.[43] Many others, however, read it as referring to later controversies between Christian groups over the validity of baptism, perhaps in the context of second/third-century Jewish-Christian communities discussed below, or of fourth-century disputes over the ritualization of baptism.[44] It seems impossible to conclusively determine the dating: though such rich imagery of purity ritual is found in baptismal contexts only from the third century onwards, there is no specific reason that it could not be envisaged also in the first century. Even if the later dating is accepted and the target of the polemic is not actual first-century Jews, *P. Oxy. 840* is a witness to the way Jewish purification was perceived in this period, and to the way this perception was deployed in polemical contexts. As in other texts, here too the rituals of other groups are marked as external, ineffective, and hypocritical, as opposed to the writer's own internal, effective, and truthful rituals. The setting of the question of ritual efficacy and character in the context of a Jewish–Christian debate lends it its identity-conferring power. Jesus does not dispute the idea that purification is needed in order to enter and view the sacred; the question is what type of purification is called for, and the answer is (presumably) baptism of the correct kind. The difference between the types of purification is encoded as "running" versus "living water," water which is in a pool versus water coming from above. This opposition seems to preclude the idea that physical "running water" is itself "living water," at least if it was not somehow sanctified. External purification is not only not efficacious but is linked to images of defilement: animal (dogs and pigs) and sexual (prostitutes and flute-girls).

[42] I follow here the reconstruction and translation of Bovon (2000), 715.
[43] Schwartz (1986); Kruger (2005).
[44] Bovon (2000); Stewart-Sykes (2009); Buchinger and Hernitscheck (2014).

In summary, many second-century writers sought to link and contrast baptism and Jewish washing rituals. The link of baptism with Jewish purification rituals is made clear in the *Didache*, many of the ritual details of which are strongly paralleled by Jewish sources. For a number of central second-century writers, this similarity led to a need to differentiate between the two. Barnabas and Justin, engaged in polemic with Judaism, situate the difference in the distinction between physical and external on the one hand and spiritual and internal on the other, continuing the purity discourse seen in food issues. Clement approaches the issue in a more complex manner: purification rituals are rejected, but they are seen to prefigure baptism, and one of the functions of baptism is to make purification after sex superfluous. Clement emphasized that baptism is unique while the water purifications are multiple, demonstrating their relative weakness. These second-century oppositions of "Jewish" and "Christian" baptism had a central role in defining the unique elements of Christian ritual in the following centuries.

## Resisting the ritual structure

The second-century texts surveyed in the following section use purity language to describe baptismal forgiveness of sins. It is intimated that the removal of sins in baptism transforms the baptizand, especially his or her interior or moral faculties, and thus allows closer connection with the divine. What these texts do not discuss is the ritual of washing itself or its structure, or the link between the physical ritual and the interior purification.

A central concern of the *Shepherd of Hermas* is an urgent and broad call to repentance for members of the community who sinned after their baptism. Though *Hermas* rarely refers directly to baptism itself, it is a witness to the view that the purification afforded by baptism is the forgiveness of past sins. The grave import of post-baptismal sin expressed in the discussion of repentance clearly assumes that baptism remits sins totally and uniquely: "the one who has received forgiveness of sins ought never to sin again, but to live in purity (ἐν ἁγνείᾳ)."[45] Sins occurring after baptism were seen as a challenge to the purity of the baptizand and to the Christian community: "Guard this flesh of yours pure and undefiled (καθαρὰν καὶ ἀμίαντον)… If you defile your flesh, you also defile the Holy Spirit, and if you defile your flesh, you shall not live."[46]

The *Epistle of Barnabas* clearly enunciates the idea that baptism is a purification from sins, which occurs while in the water: "We go down into the water full of sins and defilement (γέμοντες ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ ῥύπου), but come up out of it bearing the fruit of reverential fear in our heart and having the hope in

[45] *Hermas*, *Mand*. 4.3.2. For repentance and baptism in *Hermas*, see Grundeken (2015), 128–40.
[46] *Hermas*, *Sim*. 5.7.1–2.

Jesus in our spirits" (11.11). Defilement, parallel and here synonymous to sin, is replaced by the results of the repentance. The latter are to be found in the heart and the spirit, and this was presumably also the site of sins and defilement before baptism. Nevertheless, the internal change occurs while washing in external water. Forgiveness of sins allows the baptizand to replace his former sinful self and become a temple of God: "Before we believed in God, the dwelling place of our heart was corrupt and feeble (φθαρτὸν καὶ ἀσθενές), since it really was a temple built by hand, full of idolatry and a house of demons, because we did everything that was opposed to God . . . we have become new . . . because we have received the forgiveness of sins and have hoped in the name" (16.7–9). Again, the heart is the site of transformation, here explicitly opposed to the hands; the defilement which filled the heart is synonymous to everything "opposed to God," idolatry and demons, all of which baptism removes.[47] According to *Barnabas*, baptism serves as an initiation into the community, but its main import is the transformation of the individual which takes place through this ritual.

The *Apology of Aristides* does not mention baptism by name, but refers to a repentance from sins committed by a token Christian "in the former time, when he was blaspheming and reviling the true knowledge of the Christians."[48] Through this repentance, which presumably happened at the time of conversion, he "purifies his heart (ܠܒܐ ܕܟܝܐ) and his sins are forgiven him." Past ignorance is cited as the reason for forgiveness. As opposed to *Hermas*, the purification of the heart is attributed wholly to the person, with no role for an angel or God to assist the repentant sinner, and also no clear role for baptism. This description fits into the general thrust of the text, which as an "apology" focuses on the high morality of Christians rather than on their rituals or on God's special relation to them.

Justin Martyr is the first author to discuss baptism at any length. As argued above, in the *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin described baptism as a form of purification in order to oppose it to Jewish purifications. However, purity language does not feature in his main description of baptism in the *First Apology*, where it is described as a forgiveness of sins, a rebirth, and an illumination, "a baptism of repentance and knowledge of God."[49] In both texts, Justin clearly says that baptism is the forgiveness of past sins, and links baptism to Isaiah's call to "wash yourselves, make yourselves clean."[50] However, in the *First Apology* Justin's

[47] Benoît (1953), 39; Kelly (1985), 52. This is the earliest text explicitly connecting baptism to the removal of demons from the heart; however, there is no comprehensive theory of demons in *Barnabas*, and they do not appear to be more than a synonym for sins.

[48] Aristides, *Apology* 17 (Pouderon, 248).

[49] *1 Apol.* 61; *Dial.* 14.

[50] *1 Apol.* 61–62; *Dial.* 12–14. Justin completes the quote with "put away the evil of your doings from your souls," but the original text reads "from before my eyes." This change demonstrates Justin's focus on the purification of the person in baptism from past sins, as opposed to the cessation of sinning.

main thrust is to highlight the moral content of baptism and the personal change accompanying it and wrought by it, rather than the effect of the ritual as of itself, probably reflecting his rhetorical concerns in this text. Justin stresses that baptism is voluntary: it is undertaken by those who "are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true," and is preceded by fasting and prayer for the forgiveness of past sins.[51] Pre-baptismal repentance is an absolute requirement for forgiveness of sins.[52] Baptism is synonymous with the attainment of knowledge and understanding, and allows the baptizand to enjoy free choice. As opposed to the "first birth," coming from physical intercourse, a matter of "ignorance and necessity," baptism produces "children of choice and of knowledge (προαιρέσεως καὶ ἐπιστήμης)"; baptism is called "illumination (φωτισμός), because they who learn these things are illuminated in their minds (διάνοιαν)."[53]

Justin does not explain how baptism confers this knowledge and understanding: is it a mystical experience, in which knowledge is miraculously attained?[54] Or is actual study or exhortation involved, presumably before the immersion ritual? In the briefly described preparatory stages, only self-persuasion, repentance, fasts, and prayer are mentioned. Most scholars are sure that a period of catechesis existed, in light of other sources of the period which mention it.[55] Justin may have preferred to retain some ambiguity on this point, allowing the reader to ascribe the "illumination" to the immersion itself. Illumination indicates salvational more than substantial knowledge: free choice as a result of the comprehension of right and wrong, compared to the lack of choice before baptism resulting from ignorance. This kind of knowledge may not require lengthy study, but rather a resolution, which could more easily be seen as god-sent to some degree.[56]

In this account of baptism which gives prime place to conscious choices and moral decisions, describing baptism as a "washing of the soul," the actual washing in water is underplayed. To the extent that it does have a role, what appears to be important is the pronouncement of the name of God, and not the washing itself, which is not provided with any explanation.[57] Perhaps this is the reason that purification, too, is not Justin's preferred image in this text.

[51] *1 Apol.* 61. [52] Benoît (1953), 158–63. [53] *1 Apol.* 61.

[54] In *Hermas Mand.* 4.2 Hermas requests his angel to give him understanding (συνέτισόν με), since sins hardened his heart; the angel replies that he "gives understanding to all those who repent," but that "repentance is itself a form of understanding." The next chapter (4.3) discusses repentance in baptism and after baptism.

[55] Rordorf (1996b), 158; Ferguson (2009), 241.

[56] Korteweg (2011), 158, explains this enlightenment as a release from the demons which dominate the world, through the attainment of knowledge and the choice to repudiate them. However, Justin never explicitly links baptism to his demonology.

[57] Justin does say that the name of God is pronounced "in water," but does not explain further. The baptismal water may be a substitute for the "moist seed" of intercourse mentioned in 1 *Apol.* 61, i.e., a symbol of rebirth.

Other emphases are also present in Justin's writings. The *Dialogue* (116) alludes to baptism when speaking of remission of sin through the name of Jesus, which allows Christians to offer the "pure sacrifice." This account focuses on the believers' salvation from the devil by Jesus and on purification of sins, "the filthy garments," rather than on the relationship with Jewish washings, or on illumination and knowledge.

## Theorizing the ritual

### *The Valentinians*

Baptism is central in a number of texts from the second century attributed to followers of Valentinus or influenced by Valentinian ideas, and also appears in patristic accounts of the Valentinians.[58] These texts attest to the existence of a baptismal ritual similar to "orthodox" baptism: it included preparatory stages of fasting and prayer, stripping and clothing, an immersion in water with invocation of the name(s) of God, and completion of the rite by participation in the eucharist. Some sources also mention anointing with oil, probably after immersion, and others exorcism and consecration of the water.[59]

Valentinian texts are the earliest which explicitly confront theoretical issues of how baptism transforms the person as a composite of body and soul. The *Excerpts from Theodotus*, compiled by Clement of Alexandria, are a selection from the writings of an Alexandrian follower of Valentinus from the mid-second century, though some of the text may be from Clement himself. The text includes a number of innovative points on the theory of baptism: the agonic nature of baptism; the preparations required and their demonological explanation; and the way the ritual produces its effect.

First, the idea that baptism saves and protects from evil powers is reiterated several times.[60] As Jesus "received power to walk upon scorpions and snakes" or upon "the evil powers" through his baptism, his believers also receive these powers (76); the impure spirits (*ἀκαθάρτων πνευμάτων*), which had until now "obsessed" (*ἐνήργουν*) the baptizand, now tremble before him (77). Baptism liberates from Fate (*εἱμαρμένη*) (78), the heavenly powers controlling the world (69); it also liberates from "fire" (76), probably the fire of hell or cosmic fire responsible for purging the world from evil, which appears to enter the person at times as well.[61] In baptism the soul is saved "from the world and

[58] See Pagels (1972); Turner (2000); Thomassen (2006), 333–405; Thomassen (2010).

[59] Sagnard (1948), 234–5; Desjardins (1990), 129; Turner (2000), 88–9; Thomassen (2010), 897. These anointings and exorcisms may be linked to those of the *Apostolic Tradition* (see above, chapter 1, n. 26), though the direction of influence between the two is unclear, see Leeper (1990), 6–24.

[60] Discussed by Kelly (1985), 57–71.

[61] The fire of hell is mentioned in 37–8; fire is described in 81 as a cosmic force responsible for destroying demons and evil forces as well as for destroying "all bodies," while in the *Ecl. Prop.*

from the mouth of lions" (84), as well as from death and from "the triad of corruption (τῆς ἐν φθορᾷ τριάδος)" (80). For the *Excerpta*, baptism is primarily part of the battle of the Spirit against evil and its various manifestations, while forgiveness of sins is not mentioned. Baptism itself is not described as purification.

Second, the baptizand's role is to take part in this battle by chasing away any malignant forces which may follow him into the baptismal water, through exorcisms, prayers, and fasting, "raising of hands and kneelings." As some of these forces dwell inside the body, it is these preparatory actions which are described as purifications: "only he who is pure (καθαρός) may go down to the water" (83). This is the earliest source which provides a precise demonological reason for pre-baptismal preparations: immersion is a sacred ritual requiring prior purification. While the preparatory stage removes personal evil spirits through prayer and exorcism, baptism itself works against larger, cosmological forces: fate, "fire," "evil principalities." Only when the baptizands are free of lower-level evil influences may they proceed to the main ritual, which subdues the major ones and protects from them. The water used for baptism is also exorcised and consecrated, thus preparing it for the ritual and removing evil spirits from it.

Third, the *Excerpta* is preoccupied with explaining the relationship between the corporeal and incorporeal elements of the ritual and with its effects on the soul and on the body. As opposed to Justin, who circumvented these questions in order to better attack Jewish ritual, this writer sees more of an obligation to try and explain how a corporeal baptismal ritual works, considering that matter is basically evil and baptism is supposed to liberate from its power.[62] The *Excerpta* explicitly underplays the corporeal effect of the ritual: "the power of the transformation (μεταβολῆς) of him who is baptized does not concern the body but the soul" (77). The elements used in ritual do not change their external nature either, only their internal power is transformed: "In their external appearance (τὸ φαινόμενον) they are just as they have been . . . in the same way water, both that which has been exorcised and that which has become [fitting for] baptism, not only separates what is inferior (χωρίζει τὸ χεῖρον), but also acquires consecration (ἁγιασμὸν προσλαμβάνει)" (82). The preparation

8 and 25 Clement speaks of fire as a force discerning the evil from the good and "cleansing away evil." See Sagnard (1948), 199; Thomassen (2006), 138. Thus it is not clear why baptism would extinguish this purifying force. Cirillo (1988), 90, explains that it refers to the fire of lust, as in Ps.-Clementine *Hom*. 11.26, *Rec*. 6.9, and thus is more similar to the "passions" from which Christ rescued his believers through his Passion (*Exc*. 76). See discussion in Nardi (1984); van Unnik (1970).

[62] Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.21.4, reports that some Valentinians indeed did not perform any physical baptismal ritual, claiming that "the unspeakable and invisible power ought not to be performed by visible and corruptible creatures, nor should that of those [beings] who are inconceivable, and incorporeal, and beyond the reach of sense, [be performed] by such as are the objects of sense, and possessed of a body," and that only gnosis is required for salvation (trans. *ANF* I.346).

of the water through the power of God's name thus has two functions: a lower-level, external function of separation from evil (i.e., purification, presumably from the evil or impure spirits), and a higher-level, internal one of consecration.

If the corporeal elements do not change, why is a physical rite needed—and how can it be efficacious? The *Excerpta* attempts to answer this conundrum by arguing that baptism works on both a corporeal and incorporeal level, against two components of "fire":

> As far as fire is concerned, there is one part which is corporeal and attacks all bodies, and another which is pure and incorporeal (καθαρὸν καὶ ἀσώματον), and attacks what is incorporeal, such as demons, angels of wickedness and the adversary himself. Thus, the celestial fire has a double nature, being partly intelligible (νοητόν), partly sensible (αἰσθητόν). And baptism is double in a similar way (ἀναλόγως), being partly sensible through the water, which extinguishes the sensible fire, and partly intelligible through the spirit (πνεύματος), which protects from the intelligible fire.[63]

While the identity of "sensible" and "intelligible" fire is not spelled out, it is clear that their duality, corresponding to the duality of the person, is responsible for the dual nature of baptism. The demons' incorporeality must be attenuated according to an earlier passage of the *Excerpta* (14), which states that "The demons are said to be incorporeal, not because they have no bodies…but because, in comparison with the spiritual bodies which are saved, they are a shade." However, it is difficult to know which passages are a citation of Theodotos and which are Clement's own. In any case, the thrust of the passage is to legitimize the role of ritual through the understanding that the corporeal and the incorporeal are ultimately linked, and that rituals are required as a response to the corporeality and complexity of the person and of the cosmos. Although "the problem of the physicality of ritual is not ultimately solved," as Thomassen concludes,[64] the problem was evidently not as important for the writer and his community as the advantages and power conferred by the ritual, and the opportunities it provided for transforming the soul and liberating it from the body.[65]

The *Excerpta* gives a clearly defined place to purification in baptism by relegating it to the preparatory and exorcistic stages of the ritual. The articulation of the ritual into different stages allows for a differentiation of purification from

[63] *Exc*. 81. Translation in Thomassen (2006), 142–3; see also Procter (1995), 45–51. The sentence concerning the corporeal spirit and its relationship with the sensible fire is cryptic; perhaps the corporeal spirit both nurtures and contains the fire, maintaining it at a suitable level. For sensible and intelligible fire, see Hippolytus, *Haer*. 6.4, and *Pistis Sophia* 115–16 with van Unnik (1970).

[64] Thomassen (2006), 143.

[65] For ritual and corporeality in dualist systems, see Buckley (2007/8); Buckley (1980); BeDuhn (2000), 88–125, 209–33.

sanctification, and so for a stage in which a person may be pure but not yet sanctified. The value of demonology for constructing impurity ideas in the Alexandrian writers was shown above regarding dietary purity, and this text may be a witness for an earlier, similar move, though in a different sphere.

Another text arising from the Valentinian school and providing similar ritual theories is the *Gospel of Philip*. This anthology of aphorisms, extant in Coptic, was found among the Nag Hammadi codices. It is dated to the early third century, and may be of Syrian provenance.[66] *Philip* refers to water baptism as one of a number of sacraments essential for bringing salvation and illumination; immersion, and the anointing with oil, together provide rebirth, immortality, and perfection.[67]

In one passage, the *Gospel of Philip* refers to baptism as purification: "Through water and fire the whole place is purified (ϵYTOYBO)—the visible through the visible, the hidden through the hidden. There are some things which are hidden through what is visible. There is water in water; there is fire in a chrism (57.22–8)." This passage corresponds to the *Excerpta*'s explanation of the dual nature of baptism, adding a reference to the link between ritual practice and spiritual reality: "there are some things which are hidden through what is visible."[68] The water is not just physical, visible water, but also contains within itself hidden, spiritual water which cleanses that which is hidden in the person. However, the *Gospel of Philip* uses a term of purification where the *Excerpta* did not.

The *Gospel of Philip* includes two passages which may express a completely different understanding of baptismal purification from either forgiveness of sins or the removal of demons and fire. In these passages, baptism is described as dyeing:

> (61.12–20) God is a dyer. As the good dyes, which are called "genuine," dye (only) with the (materials) which were dyed in them, so it is with those whom God has dyed: since his dyes are immortal, they (also) become immortal through his colors. But God baptizes [or: dips, dyes, PBϫΠTIZϵ] those whom he baptizes in water.
>
> (63.25–30) The Lord went into the dye-works of Levi. He took seventy-two (cloths of different) colors and threw them into the vat. He took them out (again) all white. And he said: "Even so is the Son of Man come as a dyer."

Dyed cloth undergoes an internal transformation through assimilation with the dye—and yet it remains the same cloth; in the same way, the physical water of baptism is the medium for the immortality of god to transform the baptizand.[69] According to the second passage, baptism homogenizes and assimilates,

[66] Schencke (1992), 179–87.

[67] On baptism in the *Gospel of Philip*, see Thomassen (2006), 341–50; van Os (2007); DeConick (2001); Uro (2007).

[68] The hidden (spiritual reality) and the visible (physical, external symbol) is a motif in the *Gospel of Philip*: see 56.4, 59.15, 82.31–5, 84.1–5.

[69] For discussion of these passages, see Charron and Painchaud (2001).

transforming multiplicity into uniformity. Purification indeed has two aspects: on the one hand, differentiation of good and bad and removal of defilements, and on the other hand, the creation of a homogenized unity. Thus in this image, a person who was once "mixed," composed of different elements, becomes pure: "all white."[70] A similar idea is expressed in the *Gospel of Truth*:

> As in the case of the ignorance of a person, when he comes to have knowledge, his ignorance vanishes of itself, as the darkness vanishes when the light appears, so also the deficiency vanishes in the perfection . . . It is within Unity that each one will attain himself; within knowledge, he will purify himself from multiplicity into Unity, consuming matter within himself like fire, and darkness by light, death by life.[71]

This idea of purity may be compared to the pure, single heart, which many first- and early-second-century sources opposed to a double or defiled heart.[72]

## *Clement of Alexandria*

Clement's writings on baptism were heavily influenced by Valentinian theology, as can be seen from a comparison of the passages on baptism in his *Paedagogus*, *Stromateis*, and *Eclogae propheticae* with the ideas just encountered.[73] In his writings, Clement emphasizes the personal aspects of baptism, understanding it not so much as a ritual of incorporation into the Christian community and more as a moment of many-faceted decisive individual change:

> This ceremony is often called "free gift (*χάρισμα*)," "enlightenment (*φώτισμα*)," "perfection (*τέλειον*)," and "bath (*λουτρόν*)"—"bath," because through it we are washed clean (*ἀπορρυπτόμεθα*) of our sins; "free gift," because by it the punishments due to our sins are remitted (*ἀνείται*); "illumination," since by it we behold the wonderful holy light of salvation, that is, it enables us to see God clearly; finally,

[70] For the ideal of white as opposed to colored clothes see Clement, *Paed*. 3.53–4; for baptism turning all colors into one see *Hermas, Sim*. 9.5.5, 9.13.5, 9.17.3–4. For "all white" as pure, see also Lev 13:13, Ps 51:9, Is 1:18. This idea may also be connected to the effect of fire in baptism (above nn. 61, 63), since fire turns combustible materials into white ashes. White clothes are associated with death, for "he who is dead has become something simple, unmixed and pure": Plutarch, *RQ* 26. Dyeing can also express defilement; see Seneca, *Ep*. 59; Porphyry, *Abst*. 4.20.4–6.

[71] *Gos. Truth* 24.33–25.17 (Attridge 92–5).

[72] Jas 4:7–9; *Psalms of Thomas* 16; *Hermas*, *Vis*. 2.4, 3.2, *Mand*. 2, 9; *1 Clem*. 60.2; *2 Clem*. 11. Philo, *QG* 2.49 speaks of spiritual purification as including two stages—separation of evil thoughts and reintegration of the soul and the body. On unity, singleness, and purity see further Klijn (1962), 271–8; Lockett (2008), 21–5, 102–4, 141–4; and see below,pp. 156–7.

[73] For Clement's views on baptism, see Hägg (2010); for purification in Clement in general, see Raasch (1968). Choufrine (2002), 17–80 conducts a thorough comparison of Clement's baptismal theology with Valentinian sources on illumination and liberation from evil, and demonstrates their close correspondence. Choufrine (2002), 46–50, claims that according to Clement baptism purifies from the passions, basing his claim on an ambiguous reference in *Paed*. 1.6.29. However, even if his interpretation is correct, it is a single oblique occurrence in a very long and developed passage on baptism, which lays much more emphasis on ignorance and sin than on the passions.

> we call it "perfection" as needing nothing further, for what more does he need who possesses the knowledge of God?[74]

In this passage, the purificatory aspect of baptism—forgiveness of sins and their punishments—appears side by side with illumination and knowledge, and no interaction between them is indicated.[75] Other passages develop this connection, suggesting that they are two sides of one coin: cleansing sin is likened to the removal of a mist or obstruction from the eyes, which immediately enables vision, or true knowledge.[76] Sin or ignorance and the illumination of baptism cannot co-exist, as darkness is incompatible with light: "the very act of expelling the inferior reveals the better."[77] Idolatry results from ignorance, and both are dispelled through the gaining of knowledge or illumination, represented by Clement as washing in the water of truth.[78] The illumination of baptism is not a result of the period of instruction preceding it, but rather occurs immediately, at the time of the ritual itself:

> All our sins, in fact, are washed away (ἀπολουόμεθα); instantaneously we are no longer bad. This is one gift of illumination, that we no longer are in the same state as before we were washed . . . knowledge is engendered together with illumination, bathing the mind in light . . . Catechesis is provided to engender faith, but faith comes at baptism by the teaching of the Holy Spirit (ἅμα βαπτίσματι ἁγίῳ παιδεύεται πνεύματι).[79]

Baptismal repentance is a return to an original, more spiritual state, a process in which the material part of the soul is left behind and the soul is thereby purified:

> It will not be improper to adopt the words of those who teach that the remembrance of higher things is a filtration [or: dematerialization, purification: διυλισμόν] of the spirit, and hold that the process of filtration by spiritual apprehension (νοοῦσιν) is a withdrawal from inferior things by recalling higher things . . . we also, repenting of our sins, renouncing our iniquities (ἐλαττώμασιν), filtrated by baptism (διυλιζόμενοι βαπτίσματι), speed back to the eternal light, children to the Father.[80]

Clement sees the purification of sin and ignorance through baptism as a change in the composition of the soul itself. The same idea is developed in *Prophetic*

[74] *Paed*. 1.6.26 (Marcovich 17–18, trans. Wood 26).

[75] See also 1.6.32 (Marcovich 21): "new-born children of God, purified (κεκαθαρμένον) of *porneia* and vice."

[76] *Paed*. 1.6.27, *Ecl*. 35.1. The image is developed also by the contemporary Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol*. 1.2. See Choufrine (2002), 41–5 for an investigation of this idea in Clement and its comparison with Valentinian sources.

[77] *Paed*. 1.6.29 (Marcovich 20).

[78] *Protr*. 10.99.

[79] *Paed*. 1.6.30 (Marcovich 20).

[80] *Paed*. 1.6.32 (Marcovich 21, trans. Wood 31). Cf. *Ecl*. 5 (Früchtel 138): "Illumination is an escape from matter (ὕλη), leading us out of disorder (ἀταξία)," with Nardi (1984), 54–64.

*Eclogues* 25 through an interpretation of Matt 3:11–12. In baptism, the Holy Spirit is said to enter the person's soul and to discern (διακρίνεται) the material from the spiritual part, as wheat is discerned from chaff, since the spirit is a "power of separating material forces." "Wise fire" then destroys the material part and conserves the spiritual, as fire is "strong and capable of cleansing (καθαρτικόν) evil."[81] However, in Eclogue 7, Clement uses a cognate of διυλισμόν to designate the purification in baptism not of the material part of the soul, but rather of the impure spirits mixed up in it:

> Thus it is not the body only, but the soul, that we purify (καθαιρόμεθα). It is accordingly a sign of the sanctifying of our invisible part (σημεῖον γοῦν τοῦ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα ἡμῶν ἁγιάζεσθαι), and of the straining off (διυλίζεσθαι) from the new and spiritual creation of the impure spirits (πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα) that have got mixed up (συμπεπλεγμένα) with the soul.[82]

Clement of Alexandria is the first to make significant and clear use of purity terms in relation to baptism, not as part of anti-Jewish polemic as in Justin, but as a reflection of his theories of ritual and human nature. Before baptism the soul is seen as mixed, its superior elements inseparable from certain inferior elements, whether these be evil spirits or matter; in baptism the spirit is refined and purified of these elements. The purification of baptism is performed through gnosis, an illumination of knowledge from the Holy Spirit discerning between good and evil elements in the soul of the baptizand. Clement himself says that some of these ideas were adopted from others (*Paed*. 1.6.32), and the similarity to the *Gospel of Philip* is manifest.

## *The Acts of Thomas*

As in most of the apocryphal acts, many of the stories in the *Acts of Thomas* climax with the baptism of the hero or heroine, embodying their final rejection of the pagan world and its sexual life. However, the *Acts of Thomas* is unique in the extensive prayers and speeches surrounding baptism, which provide significant detail on the practice and theory of the ritual.

The *Acts of Thomas* features invocations to the holy spirit to act upon the baptismal elements (oil and water) and on the baptizand. In a pre-baptismal prayer (ch. 25), Thomas asks that God purify Gundaphar and his brother from

[81] These ideas are very similar to those found in Valentinian sources: see van Unnik (1970) and above, n. 61. For an interpretation of this passage, see Itter (2009), 129.

[82] *Ecl*. 7 (Früchtel 138, trans. adapted from *ANF* VIII.44). This passage indicates that the unclean spirits become part of the soul (see also *Ecl*. 12). According to *Strom*. 2.20.116, however, Clement denies that the soul harbours independent spirits, as this impinges on free will, which is essential for baptismal forgiveness of sins following repentance (*Strom*. 2.3). The discrepancy between these sources can be minimized through Eclogue 46, which explains that what is usually called "unclean spirits" are actually passions, or "qualities of wickedness." See Nardi (1984), 74–9; Kelly (1985), 52–6; Leeper (1990), 16–17; Choufrine (2002), 52, n.128.

their uncleanness (ܒܥܝܢ ܕܢܟܝܘܢ ; in the Greek, "purifying them [καθαρίσας αὐτοὺς] with your washing") and "guard them from the wolves." In the baptism itself (ch. 27), as the last in a series of invocations following anointing of the head before baptismal immersion, Thomas calls on the holy spirit to "come and purify (καθάρισον, ܢܕܟ) their kidneys and hearts."[83] Here, the purification is directed at the inner faculties of the person. In the baptism of Mygdonia (ch. 121), Thomas addresses the oil to be used for the anointing and prays: "heal her old wounds, and wash away (ܫܒܩ) from her sores," clearly metaphors for forgiveness of sins. The baptism of Vizan and his companions (ch. 156–7) is replete with purity language: Thomas prays that Jesus heal and strengthen them, "sanctify them in the impure place (ܒܐܬܪ ܛܡܝܐ ܩܕܫ ܥܡܗܘܢ) and purify them of corruption (ܢܕܟ ܠܟܠ ܣܝܐܒܘ ܒܐܬܪ ܒܥܠܡܐ) in the place of the enemy . . . and make them holy shrines and temples" (156; abbreviated in the Greek). The baptizands are conceived here as temples for the holy spirit, embattled islands of purity and holiness in the midst of a defiled world.[84] Here, sanctification and purification appear quite synonymous. Later, Thomas exclaims that the oil repels "the enemies" when the anointed "have been purified (ܕܟܝܘ ܒܗ) of their former works" (in the Syriac only), praying for forgiveness of sins, destruction of the enemy, and the healing of souls and bodies (157). Thus purification and healing of the baptizand, as well as an anti-demonic force, were among the functions of the pre-immersion anointing, an integral part of the baptismal sequence in Syrian Christianity; and the whole rite was seen as a purification as well.[85]

Considering the strong anti-sexual connotations of purity terms in the *Acts of Thomas* (see below, pp. 160–1), it may be conjectured that here too it is principally sexual sins which are purified. This may be seen in a general exhortation (ch. 58), where Thomas says that for those who believe in him (and, it is implied, repent of their sins), Jesus "will blot out (ܫܒܩ / ἀφίησιν) your former actions, and will cleanse (ܢܕܟ/καθαρίσει) you from all your earthly thoughts (Greek: bodily lusts) that abide on the earth, and will heal (ܐܬܐܣܝ/ἰάσεται) you from your sins, which, unless you repent of them to God, will accompany you and go with you." Baptismal purification as envisioned in this text consists mostly in interior cleansing—of sins, lusts, thoughts—but is at times also directed at the

[83] God "examines," "searches," or "sees" the kidneys and hearts in Jer 11:20, 17:10, 20:12, Ps 7:10, Rev 2:23. The closest parallel to a purification of these organs is Ps 26:2: "refine (צרפה) my kidneys and heart."

[84] Compare *Hermas*, *Man*. 5.1 (below, p. 145) and *Gos. Phil*. 57.23 (above, p. 126), where "the place" is said to be purified; though in all three cases it is the baptizand alone who is purified, *Thomas* chose to oppose the pure baptizand to the world, while the other texts chose to speak of the total purification of the person.

[85] Winkler (1995) explains the purificatory character of anointing as a late (fourth-century), Greek-influenced development, with its original meaning being an actualization of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. This is difficult to square with the prominence of the purificatory dimension in the third-century *Acts of Thomas*.

healing of the body. This healing may refer to an asexualization of the body, or, more directly, to actual healing.

## Summary

Forgiveness of sins was a major function of baptism according to all major second-century writers.[86] The ambiguity of Acts 2:38 concerning the exact relation between repentance, baptism, and forgiveness of sins characterizes many of the writers of the second and third centuries as well. Writers of the second century began to develop theories of baptism and sin, which explained or at least referred to the relationship between interior disposition in the form of repentance and external action in ritual, between the actions of the human practitioner and divine action. These theories frequently used images and concepts of purification to explain how baptism removes sin and other entities.

The conception that baptism purifies the person from the sins that he or she performed in the past is found in several second-century writers. While the writers distinguish between body and soul, underlying their thought is the conception that the whole person is located in (or perhaps, at) his or her body, and thus participates in the physical trait of spatiality.[87] The person as a whole is the site of former sins, which can therefore be removed from him or her through action upon the body. Sins, accordingly, are not an abstract idea, and neither are they past actions completed without leaving a mark or debts accrued in a heavenly account. Rather, they are stored in persons, transforming them in ways which can be reversed through baptism. Most of the writers emphasize that an important stage of this purification is a conscious repentance from sins, but it is clear that in order to remove them completely a ritual act must be performed which brings external powers, spiritual and physical, to bear upon both person and sins.

Justin Martyr in his externally-oriented *Apology*, on the one hand, and the more esoteric and internally-oriented Valentinian writings reflect two possible reasons for developing a baptismal theory in the second century. The Valentinian *Excerpta* expresses the need to integrate ritual in general and baptism in particular into the perspectives on human nature and cosmology of second-century Christian thinkers, and to explain the relative role of body and spirit in the ritual. Justin's *Apology* explains the efficacy and meaning of the ritual to external listeners.[88] Justin and the *Excerpta* also represent two different ways of dealing

[86] Benoît (1953), 223: "la rémission des péchés est une des constants de la doctrine baptismale. Elle apparaît chez presque tous les Pères en liason étroite avec le baptême"; Ferguson (2009), 10.

[87] See Martin (1995). For the Stoic background of this anthropology see Engberg-Pedersen (2010).

[88] A century later, Porphyry accused the Christians of purifying sin mechanically and unmorally through baptism (*Christ*. fr. 88, ed. Harnack; the attribution of these fragments is however

with the body's role in baptism: Justin ignores it, focusing on the changes which the soul undergoes, while the *Excerpta* attempts to incorporate it, though underlining its relative marginality.

Even for those authors who do not ignore the body's role in the ritual the focus of baptismal purification is undoubtedly on the interior, expressed as the soul or the heart. Thus the *Excerpta* elaborates on the various evil parts of the soul and on the consecration afforded to each through baptism. Though it posits both corporeal and incorporeal effects of baptism, this contradicts its statement that the ritual purifies from corporeality itself. This ambiguity can be attributed to the perennial dilemma of the Christian tradition: on the one hand, the influence of traditions of body–soul dualism, which taught that true purification is spiritualization—a purification from, and not of, the body; and on the other hand, the unity of soul and body, which meant that purification of the body could be performed through purification of the soul.[89] The traditional association of bodily purification with Jewish Law might be added to this dilemma.

The *Excerpta* focuses on baptism as leading to a fundamental change in the makeup of the person, rather than a change in actions and dispositions. Even if baptism is performed on a personal level, its significance is much wider, part of a battle against the forces of evil which work under various guises, both inside and outside the person. These theories allowed greater anthropological precision and integration with the dualist worldview than a simple theory of purification from sin that did not pinpoint the location of evil within the soul. Clement of Alexandria integrated this theory of baptismal purification with other traditions: he speaks of purification from sin, the filtration of the soul from its material parts, and illumination by divine knowledge as different aspects of the same process. The emphasis on the purification from matter is clearly a Platonist element, combined with the tradition of purification from sin and with demonological ideas.

A link between baptismal purification and knowledge or understanding is found in almost all of the second-century authors, attesting to the centrality of this conception. The evil forces or components which were removed from the person prevented knowledge of God and/or his commandments: purification is possible only with concurrent enlightenment, which comes from above. This divine enlightenment is connected, however, both to the believer's preliminary acceptance of the Christian message (i.e., an understanding of the truth) and to the possibility of future knowledge of God. Though the connection between knowledge and purification is understandable in a Platonic framework, it also

very much contested; see Barnes [1973]). Such accusations may have already been found in the second century: Celsus in his *Alethes Logos* (apud Origen, *Cels*. 3.59) opposes the Christian call to sinners to be baptized to that of the mysteries, which called only upon the pure. For similar later criticism, see Julian, *Contra Galileos*, 245C–D; *Caesars* 336A–B.

[89] For this fundamental ambiguity, see Stroumsa (1999), 168–90.

has biblical roots: Psalm 51, one of the main sources for baptismal (and penitential) purificatory imagery, underlines this link as well (vv. 5, 8, 15).

Demonology features in second-century writings, but it is strongly developed at this stage only in Clement's *Excerpta* and *Prophetic Eclogues*. As in food impurity, here too demonology assists in understanding the link between ritual bodily action and spiritual result.

## CONCLUSIONS

Because of baptism's centrality in Christian ritual and thought at least from the end of the first century, and its perception as a ritual of purification, it became a major site for addressing a general problem with purity: the relationship between ritual and moral purity, between the external action and the inner disposition. The solutions Christian writers brought forward for these issues are therefore important not only for the understanding of baptism itself, but also for understanding the development of purity concepts and practices in Christianity in general.

Purification from past sins is the basic understanding of baptismal purification in the second and third centuries. For second-century writers, sins reside in the soul, which is therefore the main arena for baptismal action. Valentinian writers explained that material purification is required because the body too is purified; they did not, however, go very far in developing this theory. Writers of the second century created additional perspectives for understanding baptismal purification: purification from demons, from the material itself, and development of the connection between purification and knowledge. These ideas all represent attempts to understand how ritual actions relate to spiritual purification as well as the expression of baptismal purification through Platonic theories of human nature.

Another idea which cuts across the various writers is of the connection of baptism with fire. On the one hand, the water of baptism is said to extinguish fire, understood as the fire of concupiscence or the cosmic fire which destroys sinners. On the other hand, baptism itself is likened to a purifying fire, distinguishing between evil and good and destroying sin and corporeality.

The idea that baptism exorcises demons from the soul has its traces already in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and reappears in Clement, though not as a central theme, while exorcism preceding baptism appears in the *Excerpta*. These demons are generally equated with sin, and are not provided with much personality. In baptism, the Holy Spirit vanquishes the unclean spirits, providing a clear model for how a person is transformed through the ritual.

A common theme is the marking of the water purifications of other groups as external and physical, while the purifications of the author's group are

marked as internal and spiritual. This theme, frequently illustrated through a contrast between living water and regular water, is found in the polemics of Christians against Jews and pagans, of Valentinians and other Gnostic groups against other Christians, and of the Manicheans against the Elchasites. In the first two cases, such polemic against the physical aspect of purification supports a baptismal ritual which is similar in many respects to that of the outside group. Thus its main function is in distinguishing between "our" rituals and "their" rituals, which would otherwise appear too similar. The Manicheans thus picked up on a well-known trope, but used it more radically.

The developments of the second and third centuries show a general continuity with those of the first in the constant problematization of a clear-cut distinction between moral and ritual purity. Baptism builds upon an ascetic tradition in which actions performed by the body express the status and disposition of the person as a whole. The divide between moral and ritual, though clearly recognized, is constantly breached, a result of the understanding that the person is indelibly situated in the body, and that a transformation of the person must work through the body.

Baptism is a clear example of the ascendance in early Christianity of the battle type of impurity over the truce type. The defilements removed in baptism, however they are conceptualized, are clearly evil. They cannot be temporarily managed, or given a specific place, away from the sacred. This is why Christians insisted that baptism may be performed only once, as opposed to the "washings of Moses." This stark opposition between good and evil expressed through defilement was challenged to some degree with the development of institutions of catechumenate and of pre-baptismal exorcism. These developments, extending the baptismal process, facilitated the recognition of a distinction between purification and sanctification. Non-Christians could not become immediately and totally pure through the baptismal ritual, but rather required prior purification. A similar move can be seen in post-baptismal sin in the development of rituals of penance. Here too, the defilement of sin was compartmentalized and managed, representing the return of a truce aspect into the system.

# 6

# The Pure Community, the Holy Sacrifice, and the Defilement of Sin

A major concern of writers in the two hundred years between Paul and Origen was the maintenance of a pure community, composed of pure individuals. Following chapter 5, which focused on the process of purification required for entering the community, this chapter will discuss the defilement of members of the community, their effects, and mechanisms developed for purifying them. The role of purity discourse was not limited to the differentiation of the Christian community from its surroundings, but was also instrumental in creating and dismantling hierarchies inside the community and in articulating responses to internal crises. As in baptism, the major defilement which required purification was of sin and its effects. Sin was frequently described as defilement: dangerous, contagious, and especially opposed to the sacred sacrifice of the community, the eucharist. Sin works on two interconnected levels: the individual member of the community and the community as a whole. For many authors of this period, purity discourse served to articulate the causes and effects of sin on the individual level, the interaction between components of the person, as well as the links between the individual and communal level. Furthermore, it was reflected in the practices and rituals which developed in this period for coping with sin and sinfulness on the individual and communal level: sexual and alimentary renunciation, repentance, penance, and excommunication.

As outlined in chapter 2, defilement language was used to describe specific types of sins in the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple period texts and in Greco-Roman culture. The "big three," returning again and again in various combinations, are murder, idolatry, and sexual sins.[1] Deceit and falsehood are also frequently described with defilement language, especially in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Authors from Christian communities continued with this selection, with some expansions and changes, as can be seen in the sins which the Gospels claim defile the person in place of food. Mark states (7:21–2): "For it is from

[1] See pp. 26–8, 40.

within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, evil eye, evil speech (= slander or blasphemy, *βλασφημίαι*), arrogance and folly";[2] Matthew (15:19) has a similar list, "murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, evil speech."[3] As Klawans noted, these correspond to some extent to the regular items of Second Temple period lists: murder, sexual sins, and deceit continue to appear.[4] However, there are also significant changes. First, the selections of sins: looking at the more concise Matthew, from the big three idolatry has been substituted by "theft" while the sexual dimension is expanded to two terms—adultery and *porneia*. Together with "false testimony," these closely approximate the latter, "social" half of the Ten Commandments.[5] "Slander/blasphemy" is added in both lists and a host of other terms in Mark.[6] Third, there is an emphasis on the heart and on the "evil thoughts" (*logismoi*), not only on the sinful actions, as the source of defilement.

The parallel to the latter half of the Ten Commandments may explain why murder rather than idolatry features in these lists, even though idolatry, as seen in the previous chapters, featured as a source of defilement in many other texts. Seen from the perspective of the individual community member and his or her relationships with other members, it is understandable that the emphasis shifts from ritual to social sins. Matthew and Mark thus bring to the fore slander, theft, deceit, and especially sexual sins as the significant and most dangerous defilements for the individual and the community. Christian texts of the late first and second century continue to describe avarice, slander, and deceit, as well as false doctrines and false prophecies, as dangerous defilements.[7] Some texts note the danger of these sins to the community, due to their divisiveness and undermining of authority, while others focus on the interior aspect of defilement—the division or contamination of the heart, whether by the individual or by exterior forces. However, though various sins are described as defiling in early Christian texts, it is sexuality in general and sexual sins in

[2] *ἔσωθεν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς καρδίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοὶ ἐκπορεύονται, πορνεῖαι, κλοπαί, φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι, πλεονεξίαι, πονηρίαι, δόλος, ἀσέλγεια, ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρός, βλασφημία, ὑπερηφανία, ἀφροσύνη·* The context of social sins indicates that *βλασφημίαι* here should probably be translated as slander (or evil speech) in general rather than blasphemy against the divine in particular.

[3] *φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι, πορνεῖαι, κλοπαί, ψευδομαρτυρίαι, βλασφημίαι.*

[4] Klawans (2000), 148–9.

[5] The fifth commandment is cited a little earlier, Matt 15:4, Mk 7:10; *porneia* may be a gloss on the tenth commandment, "do not covet your neighbor's wife"; see Matt 5:28.

[6] The Tannaim also singled out slander, arrogance, and financial deceit as defilements, based on scriptural precedents and prooftexts; see Klawans (2000), 98–104. For the development of the idea of leprosy as a result of slander and gossip in *Leviticus Rabba*, a fifth–sixth-century work integrating earlier traditions, see Jacobowitz (2010), 121–84.

[7] *Ep. Polycarp* 4.2–3, 11.2; Titus 1:13–15; 2 Tim 2:16–22; 2 Pet 2:13; Jud 1:8–13, 23; Jas 3:6; Rev 22.15; *Didache* 14.2. These purity discourses require further study; see Maier (1993) on avarice, Horbury (1998a), 118–26 on falsehood.

particular—more than idolatry and murder, more than avarice and deceit—which most attracted purity discourse.

But before entering in more detail into the development of the impurity of sexual sin in chapter 7, I shall refer in this chapter to the question of sin in the community more generally and its relationship with the eucharist, the Christian community's central ritual. Following baptism, sin could be removed through repentance or penance, and, according to some sources, by participating in the eucharist as a remover and purifier of sins. A third issue was of purity requirements for participating in the eucharist, seen as a sacred ritual or object. Thus the eucharist attained a dual or complex role: It remitted or purified sins, but also required prior preparation and purification.

## THE EFFECT OF THE EUCHARIST ON THE COMMUNICANT

Early Christian communities took part in a communal meal of bread and wine or water, together with a blessing or prayer, known as the eucharist. There must have been much diversity in the exact formulae and rituals surrounding the eucharist, and in the meaning this ritual had for the participants.[8] Paul (1 Cor 11:24–6) speaks of the eucharist as a proclamation "of the Lord's death," and cites Jesus' words that the bread is "my body that is for you," while the cup "is the new covenant in my blood"; he also calls it a "communion of the body/blood of Christ." Thus at this stage—as also in Mark's narrative of the last supper—there is no mention of the eucharist as a remitter of sins. John 6:54 cites Jesus as saying that "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." Matt 26:28 alone adds that the blood of the covenant is "for the forgiveness of sins (*εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*)," a phrase identical to that used by Acts 2:38 for the effects of baptism; however, Matthew does not say that this effect of Jesus' blood-shedding recurs through the eucharist. Likewise, the Epistle to the Hebrews, which goes into great detail as to Jesus' sacrificial and purifying death, does not say the same about the eucharist.

In the second century, Ignatius (*Eph.* 20:2) refers to the eucharist as a "a medicine that brings immortality (*φάρμακον ἀθανασίας*), an antidote that allows us not to die but to live at all times in Jesus Christ,"[9] raising medical imagery, but not as a purifying removal of sickness; rather as a giver of life. Justin Martyr may thus be the first who gives the eucharist a purificatory color, when he says that the leper's flour sacrifice upon his purification was a type of the eucharist since it is offered "in memory of the suffering he endured for all those souls who are

[8] For overviews, see McGowan (1999b); Smith (2003).

[9] Trans. Ehrman I.241. For the phrase "medicine of immortality," see Schmid (2007), 412–23.

purified from sin (τῶν καθαιρομένων τὰς ψυχὰς ἀπὸ πάσης πονηρίας ἀνθρώπων)…and that at the same time we should thank God…for having saved us (ἠλευθερωκέναι ἡμᾶς) from the sin in which we were born, and for the total destruction of the powers and principalities of evil through Him who suffered."[10] Justin's choice of the leper's offering rather than any other biblical offering is clearly meant to evoke a connection between the eucharist and purification. However, although the mood of the verb καθαιρομένων suggests that the purification occurs in the present, it is not clear that this occurs through the eucharist, but rather through Jesus' suffering, reverberating through to baptism.[11] Justin follows this with a midrash on the verses in Malachi: the sacrifice Gentiles offer in all places glorifies God's name, while that offered by the Jews profanes it. The purity and purification of the Christian eucharist is contrasted with the profanation of the Jewish temple sacrifices.

By the third century the idea that the eucharist purifies the communicant gained some traction. In the East Syrian liturgy of Addai and Mari, considered one of the earliest extant liturgies, the community prays that "the holy spirit come and rest upon this oblation of your servants, and bless and hallow it, that it might be to us, O Lord, for the pardon of debts and the forgiveness of sins."[12] Likewise, in the *Acts of Thomas*, the eucharist is "for the remission of transgressions and sins," "for life and rest and joy and health and for the healing of your souls and of your bodies."[13] However, despite the wording of these prayers, the idea that the eucharist eradicates and purifies sin is not widespread in this period. Much more common is the perception of the eucharist as a sacred object and ritual, which therefore requires prior preparation and purification.

## THE EUCHARIST AS SACRED OBJECT REQUIRING PURITY

With time, the eucharist acquired more articulated practices which distinguished the eucharistic meal from everyday meals, marking it as sacred. In this section, I investigate the development of practices of the restriction of access to

[10] *Dial*. 41; Marcovich 137, trans. Falls 210.

[11] Thus Kollmann (1990), 144–5. It is possible to translate "in memory of the suffering he endured for all those souls who *purified themselves*," taking the medium rather than the passive meaning of the verb; such a translation gives the believers a much more central role. Compare the same form in 4.3, where it is clearly the person who does the purifying. See similarly in *Dial.* 116–17, where Christians are purified of their "filthy" sins "through the name of His first-begotten Son," preparing the way for the pure sacrifice, the eucharist.

[12] Though the text as it is may be from the fourth/fifth century, the idea of forgiveness of sins occurs in related anaphoras, such as the Maronite *Sharar*, and is therefore considered early. See Spinks (1984).

[13] *Acts of Thomas* 50, 133, 158. For spirit epicleses over the eucharist in this text, see Myers (2010), 132–8.

the eucharist of certain people, or at certain times or places. Such practices should be examined as potential purity practices, since they are involved in the protection and distancing of elements perceived (for various reasons) as sacred from people perceived as deficient in some way.[14] One significant restriction is baptismal—it was generally accepted that the non-baptized may not participate in the eucharist, as discussed in the previous chapter. Here I shall focus on internal restrictions on members of the community. The restriction of certain members of the community from the sacrifices and/or meals of the community, whether temporarily for reasons of bodily defilement or crimes, or permanently due to their status, was a common practice in Jewish and Greco-Roman societies; these restrictions were at times described by purity language.[15]

In 1 Corinthians 10:14–22, Paul interprets the breaking of bread and drinking of the cup as a participation in the one body of Christ, thus emphasizing the significance of the common meal ("the cup of the Lord," "the bread of the Lord") as a force for and symbol of the unification of the community.[16] He further underlines the incompatibility of participation in this meal with participation in idol sacrifice, constructing it as a site for expressing the distinction of the Christian community from the surrounding social world. From the earliest stages, therefore, participation in the common meal plays a role in determining inclusion in the Christian community or exclusion from it, complementing the singular baptismal crossing of the border into the Christian community with a continual ritual maintaining this border.[17] Furthermore, the bread and cup are not immediately accessible even to members of the community, for they must be approached with the correct disposition (1 Cor 11:27–31):

> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself (δοκιμαζέτω δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτόν), then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body (μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα) eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died… So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment.

This passage presents regulations for the modes of participation in the meal which do not relate to the world outside the community, but rather to the relations inside it. The meal must be consumed in a worthy manner, with true self-

[14] Few studies have attempted to investigate this theme in a general manner, beyond specific patristic authors or specific purity dimensions (mostly sexual). An exception is Caseau (2009).

[15] See pp. 21–2, 43–4; Dickie (2001). Much has been written on the relationship between Christian, Hellenistic, and Jewish communal or ritual meals. See Smith (2003); Coutsoumpos (2006), 9–57.

[16] I use the term "eucharist" in this chapter as shorthand for the communal eating of the bread and drinking of the cup, although it does not appear as a technical term before the early second century.

[17] Gooch (1993); Meeks (2003), 157–62; Smith (2003), 173–218.

judgment and concern for others. Not abiding by these rules leads to divine condemnation and judgment upon the body of the participant. While these verses are quite obscure—it is not at all clear what "discerning the body (διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα)" would include, or what "the body" refers to[18]—context indicates that Paul's focus is on the character of the partaking community and not on the bread and cup as sacred objects requiring purification for access.[19] Nevertheless, in his discussion of the social ills plaguing the communal meal, Paul interprets it as a religious ritual to be performed under specific circumstances and rules, enforced by divine judgment for transgressors.

It is quite probable that contemporary readers understood these rules in the light of purity requirements for worship with which they were acquainted from other religious contexts, especially considering Paul's language of self-discernment (διακρίνων) and self-examination (δοκιμαζέτω). Indeed, many Christian writers of the first centuries saw the need to manage the access of members of the community to the eucharist, frequently citing these verses.

The *Didache* stipulates that the eucharist be withheld from non-baptized outsiders: "But let none eat or drink of your eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, 'Give not that which is holy to the dogs.'"[20] As Huub van de Sandt notes, the understanding that the eucharist is "holy" and that therefore it should not be given "to the dogs" creates a clear parallel between the eucharist and the sacrifices at the Jerusalem temple, in light of a rule well attested in early rabbinic sources that the meat of the sacrifices should not be given to dogs to eat.[21] This sacrificial stance towards the eucharist and its consequences for the purity required of its participants is even more evident from two passages which deal with internal restrictions:

> On the Lord's Day of the Lord come together, break bread and hold eucharist (or: and give thanks, εὐχαριστήσατε), after confessing your transgressions that your sacrifice may be pure (καθαρὰ ἡ θυσία ὑμῶν ᾖ); but let none who has a quarrel with his fellow join in your meeting until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice be not profaned (κοινωθῇ). For this is that which was spoken by the Lord, "In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice, for I am a great king," says the Lord, "and my name is wonderful among the nations."[22]

Here, the terms "sacrifice" (θυσία), "pure" (καθαρὰ) and "profaned" (κοινωθῇ) are explicitly used in the context of issues of social cohesion which must be put

[18] Options for the latter include the body of the worshiper himself, the body of the community, that of Christ which embodies it, and that of the eucharistic bread. The relevance of this question for modern discussions of "sacramentalism," as can be seen from the heated disputes in modern commentaries, is not helpful for discerning the text's original meaning and reception. See a summary of the various positions in Thiselton (2000), 891–9.

[19] See Fee (1987), 558–69; Martin (1995), 190–7; Coutsoumpos (2006), 99–111.

[20] *Didache* 9.5, Ehrman I.430–1.

[21] Van de Sandt (2002).

[22] 14.1–3, Ehrman I.438–9.

to rest if the community is to function liturgically. The profanation of the "pure sacrifice" (referring to the bread, prayer, or both) is the result of both "transgressions," personal sins which do not have a social dimension, and "quarrels", social sins.[23] These can be expiated through confession and reconciliation, respectively, which are considered sufficient to make the community and its members suitable for the "pure sacrifice."[24]

The idea of prayer and good works as sacrifices is ancient, running from the Hebrew Bible through Greek and non-Greek Second Temple period sources to the Gospels and other first-century Jewish writings. However, in the same way that moral purity was reified in the practice of baptism, the idea of "spiritual" sacrifice was reified in the practice of a bread-and-cup.[25] The *Didache*'s standpoint on the purity required for its ritual meal is, as many scholars have commented, a transfer of language previously used concerning the temple cult to the realm of the ritual meal, which included both eating and prayer. The requirement of purity from sins for participation in the community's ritual may be compared to similar limitations in the Dead Sea sect and the *ḥabura*.

Another line from the *Didache* concerning the eucharist points to similar ideas: "If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent."[26] Clearly, it is possible to become "holy" (ἅγιός) through repentance, which appears to parallel the confession of transgressions of chapter 14.[27] There is no sign here of a specific ritual that would render a person fit for participation, and presumably each member of the community would make an independent decision on the matter. But the principle remains that access to the eucharist is restricted for certain members.

The practical import of these passages of the *Didache* is similar to that of Paul's in 1 Cor 11, with both of the writers relating to social and personal dimensions of the moral purity required for the eucharist. However, the two writers appear to base their conceptions of the holiness of the eucharist on different foundations: while Paul speaks of "the body and blood of the Lord" of which the unworthy will be guilty, the *Didache* invokes the communal meal as a sacrifice which requires moral purity. Paul therefore appears to be more innovative, while the *Didache* draws upon common language and ideas of its era.

The epistles of Ignatius also present the eucharist as holy and requiring certain conditions for participation. Ignatius' main emphasis concerning the eucharist is on the importance of the unity of the community, its hierarchical

[23] See Rordorf (1973); Riggs (1995); Draper (2008).

[24] Confession of sins is also required before prayer, in order not to approach God with an evil conscience (4.14).

[25] See Hanson (1976); Young (1979); Ferguson (1980).

[26] 10.6, Ehrman I.432–3.

[27] As in baptism, even if the logic of purity is retained, requiring that only pure people access the holy sacrifice, there is some slippage in the terminology—the adjectives "pure" and "holy" are used interchangeably. Thus, following the wording of Malachi, the sacrifice is said to be "pure" not "holy," and it is the "holy" people who are called to approach the sacrifice.

structure, and the authority of the bishop. Thus he says: "He that is within the altar-area is pure (ὁ ἐντὸς θυσιαστηρίου ὢν καθαρός ἐστιν), but he that is without is not pure; that is, he who does anything apart from the bishop, and elders, and deacons, such a man is not pure in his conscience (τῇ συνειδήσει)."[28] "The altar" is imagined as a space with clear borders, which symbolize not the baptismal borders of the community, but internal borders between those who have authority over the sacrifice (presumably, the eucharist)[29]—and those who are not willing to accept their authority, and who are thus defiled. The unity and order of the community are its purity: "I have not found any division among you, but filtration (ἀποδιϋλισμόν)… Take heed, then, to have but one eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup through the unity of His blood; one altar; as there is one bishop…"[30] For Ignatius, purity is not so much the prerequisite for participation in the sacrifice as the result of correct practice of the ideal community—clearly defined, well-ordered, and centered on one unified sacrifice.

In the mid-second century, Justin speaks of three requirements for participation in the eucharist: belief in the correct tenets, baptism, and living "in just the way that Christ handed down."[31] The explanation for this restriction is that eucharistic food is not common (κοινὸν), a word which in this context receives two complementary meanings: it is special and sacred food, and should therefore be treated in a special fashion; and it is not common to all, as only the aforementioned people may partake of it.

In the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin refers to the eucharist as a sacrifice, citing the same verses as the *Didache* (Mal 1:10–12),[32] but his argument for treating the eucharist as sacred and pure rests upon it being the flesh and blood of Jesus. As opposed to the *Didache*, Justin does not use purity language to describe the restrictions on eucharist participation, and does not link between the restrictions and the eucharist's sacrificial dimension. In other words, the *Didache*'s use of sacrificial ideas to underpin the eucharist goes much deeper than Justin's and extends to the practices surrounding sacrifices, while for Justin, perhaps following a Pauline trajectory, the understanding of eucharist as sacrifice appears more superficial, not requiring sacrificial purity restrictions.

A similar situation is found in Irenaeus, who describes the eucharist as a sacrifice, but does not mention exclusion.[33] He does comment, however, on the importance of the disposition of the offerer, saying that "Sacrifices, therefore, do not sanctify a man, for God stands in no need of sacrifice; but it is the conscience of the offerer that sanctifies the sacrifice when it is pure." Irenaeus combines the ideas and language of Matthew 15:20 (things defiling and not defiling

[28] *Trall.* 7. The impurity of conscience resulting from division and unbelief may echo Titus 1:15.
[29] Cf. *Eph.* 5: "if any one be not within the altar, he is deprived of the bread of God."
[30] *Phil.* 3–4. [31] *1 Apol.* 66. [32] *Dial.* 41; 117.
[33] Haer. 4.17.5–18.2. See Hanson (1976), 81–2; Ferguson (1980), 1177–9.

a person) with 1 Corinthians 8:7–13 (the conscience as a site of defilement from food) as well as 1 Timothy 4:4–5 (nothing is impure if received with thanksgiving [μετὰ εὐχαριστίας], as it is sanctified [ἁγιάζεται] through prayer and God's word); as in 1 Timothy, the matter here is not of purification and defilement, but rather of sanctification.

The second-century references to exclusion from the eucharist are of two kinds. The first is the exclusion of the non-baptized, who due to their sins which have not been washed away by baptism are seen as defiled (*Didache*) or not suitable for partaking of the body and blood of Christ (Justin); the second is the exclusion of baptized people due to practices or beliefs differing from that of the community (Justin), their quarrels or transgressions (*Didache*), or their non-submission to authority (Ignatius). Both concerns can be generally subsumed under the title of border- and community-building, whether from inside or from the outside, in which the eucharist ritual has a role as a practiced symbol of unity, homogeneity, and distinction from general society. What we do not find in these writers, however, is the exclusion of baptized people from the eucharist because of their bodily dispositions—i.e., ritual purity. In light of the small number of sources and their relative lack of interest in ritual detail, this silence does not prove that such exclusion was not practiced, only that it was not an issue of contention.

The power of sin to defile the eucharist—or alternatively, the power of the eucharist to damage a sinning participant—has until now been described from the aspect of access restrictions. The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles include two stories which explain what may happen to those who do not abide by such restrictions. In the *Acts of Peter*, tentatively dated to the turn of the second century, Paul warns Rufina, whom he discerns as an adulteress, not to partake of the eucharist, as "you are not coming to the altar of God like a true (worshiper)…yet you seek to receive God's eucharist. Behold Satan shall break your body and cast you down…and at once Rufina fell down and was paralyzed."[34] The role of the eucharist is not spelled out in this story, but it certainly led to Paul's discovery of the woman's sin. More clearly in the *Acts of Thomas* 50–1, the apostle holds a eucharist following baptism; the apostle prays that the eucharist "be to you for the remission of transgressions and sins and for the everlasting resurrection…for life and rest, and not for judgment and vengeance." The eucharist is double-edged: it can purify from sins if received correctly, but will judge the receiver if not. One person—who, as it later turns out, was a murderer—was about to eat it, "but both his hands dried up and did not come to his mouth." All agree that "he was convicted by the eucharist of our Lord."[35]

[34] *Acts of Peter*, Actus Vercellenses 2.

[35] For the dangerous qualities of the eucharist in Western third-century sources, see e.g. Cyprian, *de Lapsis* 2, 15–17, 25–6; *idem*, *On the Lord's Prayer* 18; *Apostolic Tradition* 35–8.

## REPENTANCE AND PENANCE AS PURIFICATION

Sins are remitted in baptism, but individuals continued to sin also after baptism. If sin is seen as a defilement of the individual, the community, and the eucharist, it necessarily requires mechanisms for expiation, also beyond baptism. There are two options for this: expulsion of the sinner from the community, and removal of sin through repentance or penance, both of which may or may not be institutionalized to various degrees.[36]

As described above, Paul required "self-examination," and the *Didache* a purifying confession and repentance, before participating in the eucharist. According to these texts, even sinners may attain the purity required for participation. Many other texts of the first two centuries also urge repentance for post-baptismal sin, though usually on an individual level, without commenting on social structures framing this experience.[37] Some writers thought that repentance from some sins was impossible: according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, since "Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (10:12), deliberate sin "after receiving the knowledge of the truth" is inexpiable and can only be met with divine vengeance (10:26–31).[38] Purification terms are occasionally and non-systematically used in exhortation to repent. In *1 Clement* 60, Clement prays that god "forgive us for our lawless acts… purify us with the purification of your truth (καθάρισον ἡμᾶς τὸν καθαρισμὸν τῆς σῆς ἀληθείας)",[39] and 1 John 1:9 states that "If we confess (ὁμολογῶμεν) our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive (ἀφῇ) us our sins and purify (καθαρίσῃ) us from all unrighteousness." In both of these cases, purification comes from above following repentance. In *2 Clement* 13.1, repentance itself is purification: "at last we should repent… we should wipe away (ἐξαλείψωμεν) our former sins away from ourselves."

The earliest text in which repentance as purification comes into focus is the *Shepherd of Hermas*. The *Shepherd*'s main concern is personal conversion, μετάνοια; the key to a virtuous life is found in maintaining a simple (ἁπλότης), single heart, as opposed to a double heart or soul (δίψυχος), in which hypocrisy and cunning reign. The *Shepherd*'s discussion of sin and repentance, framed by purity terms, is mostly concerned with the personal or familial level,

[36] For the various options in early Christian sources, see Bryant (1998); Stroumsa (1999), 158–67; Horn (2006); Torrance (2012), 64–87; Foucault (2014).

[37] See Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 7:9–11; Js 5:14–16; Rev 2:5, 2:16, 2:22, 3:3; Acts 8:22; 1 Jn 1:7–2:2; 5:16–18; *1 Clem.* 7–8, 51–2, 57.

[38] See similarly Heb 6:4–8; deSilva (2000), 343–54. Hebrews does not explain how non-deliberate sin is to be accommodated. *2 Clem.* 7–9 exhorts readers to "keep the seal of baptism stainless" and says that those who do not do so will be punished (7.6, Ehrman 176–7); at the same time, it calls for repentance "while we are still in the world," presumably after baptism, so God will heal the sinners (cf. 16.1).

[39] Ehrman I.142; as part of his call for repentance, *1 Clem.* cites many verses pertaining to purification from sin: Ps 51:2, 9, 12 (*1 Clem.* 18); Job 14:4–5 (*1 Clem.* 17); Is 1:16–20 (*1 Clem.* 8).

and not the level of the community.[40] However, *Hermas* does describe the purification of the community by expulsion of the sinners.[41] In one of the longest visions in the book, Similitudes 9 (an elaboration of a similar vision in *Vis*. 3), Hermas is taught an elaborate parable of the church as a tower built of stones. As part of the building project, the "lord of the tower" strikes the stones to examine them; those which turn black, develop cracks, or are stained are removed from the tower and replaced (9.6.5–6). Later, some of the rejected stones are cleaned and repaired, while others are cast out (9.8). The angel explains that this represents individuals in the community sinning, and repenting or remaining sinful (9.13–14); casting out the wicked purifies the church of God (καθαρισθήσεται ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ, 9.18.2), making it unified and singular: "And then the Son of God will exult and be glad in them, when he has received his people pure (καθαρόν)" (9.18.4).

In *Mandates* 5.1, the person, described as a "vessel" (σκεῦος) or a "place" (τόπος), is said to be inhabited by a holy and an evil spirit; the holy spirit will only remain inside the person if this "place" is pure (καθαρόν), that is, if it is not "obscured," "oppressed," or "choked" by the evil spirit. In this case, the holy spirit is contaminated and departs.[42] The person is conceived as a neutral place, but also as potential locus of holiness, contaminated by anger, ill-temper, and double-mindedness, which attract the evil spirit. Once the holy spirit is defiled and crowded out, the person is led to "great sin," presumably including especially sexual sin.[43]

For *Hermas*, both the heart and the flesh function as loci for the indwelling of the holy spirit, and both must therefore be kept pure for it to remain.[44] The flesh is defiled only by sexually sinful actions, such as the prohibited marriages discussed in *Mandates* 4; such actions are clearly of social import for the community (for sexual sin in Hermas, see below, pp. 155–6). The heart, however, as a more delicate organ, is defiled even by sinful emotions—sadness, anger, and the like—which draw in the evil spirits, leading in turn to sexual sins of the heart and of the flesh. Such mismanagement of the heart leading to defilement

[40] Maier (1991), 65–86, who discusses purity language in *Hermas*, focuses on the community rather than the individual. With a Douglasian focus on boundaries and ambiguity, Maier argues that *Hermas* is not concerned so much with sin as with "an effort to re-establish the boundaries of his church by the removal of impurity" (69). *Hermas*' lack of interest in outsiders' impurity, however, does not point in this direction. For repentance in *Hermas*, see Grundeken (2015), 133–40.

[41] See Bryant (1998), 67–72, Grundeken (2015), 79–82 for discussion.

[42] See also *Man.* 10.2–3, 12.5; for the sources, reception, and implications of these ideas, see Fredrikson (2001); Bucur (2006); compare also Valentinus' description of the heart in fr. 2 and commentary by Markschies (1992), 54–83.

[43] *Man.* 5.2.4 (Ehrman II.258–9). For "great sin" as sexual, see *Man.* 4.1.1–2. For anger as the main sin caused by evil spirits leading to greater sins, see *T. Dan*; *Didascalia* 3; *m. Abot* 4.1; *t. B. Qam.* 9.31 with Rosen-Zvi (2011), 29–31.

[44] *Man.* 12.6.5; *Sim.* 5.7.4.

would be dangerous especially for Hermas as a person in contact with the holy spirit, which indwelling allows for both effective prayer and true prophecy.[45]

Repentance is possible and indeed imperative, and is commonly described as self-purification.[46] Hermas is punished because of the sins of his household; they must therefore "repent and purify themselves from every desire of this world." It is not enough to repent "with their whole heart"; they must afflict themselves until "the heart…[is] pure from every evil thing (καθαρὰν ἀπὸ παντὸς πονηροῦ πράγματος)," and only then will God heal them.[47] In other cases, purification appears to come from above following repentance.[48] However, God grants the power of repentance only to those "whose heart He saw would become pure," as opposed to those who "intended to repent hypocritically,"[49] or those who are doubleminded, not totally sincere.[50] Furthermore, only one chance is given for repentance and a return to purity; further sins after the revelation to Hermas will not be tolerated (*Vis.* 4.1.8, 4.3.6). In other words, purification of the person or of the heart means a total and unconditional putting away of sin, with no possibility of it entering back in.

Hermas emphasizes that repentance is a type of understanding: "For the one who sins understands that he has done something evil before the Lord, and what he has done rises up in his heart."[51] Repentance is described as self-discernment, which, as Deborah Lipsett argues, may accord with a Foucauldian perspective on self-purification through repentance as an "examination of self with respect to the relation between the hidden thought and an inner impurity."[52] However, it may be noted that this process of self-discernment and examination of the psyche, which occurs throughout the text, is itself not described as purification. Rather, the eradication of sin, of evil emotions, and of doubt is the purificatory act. This eradication occurs through a conscious decision to stop sinning, by purgation of affliction and suffering (*Vis.* 4.3.4), and by the action of God from above.

[45] See Bucur (2006) and Reiling (1973), 97–121. For example, the prayers of a person with "grief reclin[ing] in his heart" do not rise to the heavenly altar, because the grief is mixed up with the holy spirit, like vinegar with wine. It is therefore imperative to "purify oneself from…evil grief" (*Mand.* 10.3).

[46] *Vis.* 2.3.1 (that they may be purified [καθαρισθῶσιν] from their former sins); 3.2.2 (you will be purified [καθαρισθήσῃ] of your shortcomings); 3.9.8 (You have grown calloused and refuse to purify your hearts); 4.2.5 (if your heart becomes pure and blameless [καθαρὰ καὶ ἄμωμος]); *Mand.* 9.4 (purify your heart from the vanities of the age…purify your heart from double-mindness). See Raasch (1968), 29–33.

[47] *Sim.* 7.2 (Ehrman II.352–30); see also Sim. 8.11.3, 9.23, 9.33.

[48] *Vis.* 3.2.2, 3.9.11.

[49] *Sim.* 8.6.2 (Ehrman II.372–3).

[50] *Vis.* 2.2.4, 3.2.2; Sim. 8.11.3.

[51] *Mand.* 4.2.2 (Ehrman II.248–9).

[52] Foucault (1988b), 46; see Lipsett (2011), 52; for a lecture of Foucault on *Hermas*, see Foucault (2014), 167–92. This may reflect a basic paradox of this text: self-discernment is the process which Hermas actually goes through in his visions, but doubt and self-examination are repeatedly castigated as opposed to true faith, a form of doublemindedness and defilement. For this paradox see Cox Miller (1994), 139–42.

Valentinus, in the first half of the second century, continued the *Shepherd*'s link between demons, defilement, the heart, and sin. In one of his longest extant fragments, he says:[53]

> There is one good, by whose presence is the manifestation, which is by the Son, and by Him alone can the heart become pure (καθαρὰ γενέσθαι), by the expulsion (ἐξωθουμένου) of every evil spirit from the heart: for the multitude of spirits dwelling in it do not allow it to be pure (καθαρεύειν); but each of them performs his own deeds, polluting it in various ways with unseemly desires. And the heart seems to be treated somewhat like an inn. For the latter has holes and ruts made in it, and is often filled with dung (κόπρου); men living filthily in it, and taking no care for the place as belonging to others. So fares it with the heart as long as there is no thought taken for it, being impure (ἀκάθαρτος), and the abode of many demons. But when the only good Father visits it, it is sanctified, and gleams with light. And he who possesses such a heart is so blessed, that he shall see God.

Clement of Alexandria, who cited this text of Valentinus, criticized the lack of human agency in the purificatory process he described.[54] Clement wrote extensively on the stages of spiritual progress leading to and after baptism, up to the apex of a clear unobstructed vision of God. Clement's focus is on the individual progress of the Gnostic through various stages, and on the interplay of actions of human and divine.[55] Purification from sin, the body, the passions, and false doctrines are some of his favored images to describe this progress,[56] and both the successive purifications of the Greek Mysteries and those of the priests in the Jerusalem Temple are used to exemplify its various stages.[57] Clement identifies knowledge as the main instrument of purification; knowledge of a higher order, that of the vision of God, is also the end result of purification.[58] Other instruments of purification, relevant especially in the earlier stages of spiritual progress, are fasting and ascetic acts,[59] punishments or suffering,[60] and, of course, cessation of sin.[61] Clement's focus is almost totally on the individual body, soul, and self; purification of the community through expulsion of sinners or through institutionalized penance is hardly discussed.

[53] Ed. Otto Stählin, *Clemens Alexandrinus* II (GCS 15), pp. 174–5; trans. *ANF* II.372. For commentary on this fragment, see Markschies (1992), 54–83; Thomassen (2006), 451–7.

[54] Citation: *Strom.* 2.20.114.3–6; criticism: *Strom.* 2.20.115.

[55] Méhat (1954); Behr (2000), 125–208.

[56] E.g., *Strom*. 4.22.143, 4.23.152, 5.1.13, 7.4.27; *Paed.* 1.7, 1.51, 2.1; *Quis Div.* 19, 42. Cf. references in the next five notes.

[57] *Strom*. 4.25.157–9; 5.4.19; 5.39.3; *Ex. Theod.* 27.1–6. For the latter two texts on the Jewish high priest, see Stökl Ben-Ezra (2003), 237–43.

[58] *Strom*. 1.19.94, 2.6.26, 2.13.56–7, 4.6.39–40; 5.1.13; 7.3.13; 7.10.56; *Prot.* 1.10; *Ecl.* 34.

[59] For fasting see above, pp. 79–80 *Ecl.* 14.

[60] *Strom*. 6.14; *Paed.* 1.64–5, 82–3; *Ecl.* 26.

[61] *Strom*. 6.7.60.2–3.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the first two centuries CE there is little evidence for an institutional response to sin in the community in which the defilement of sin is said to be purified, at least as regards non-sexual sin. Though *Hermas*, for example, does speak of the purification of the community as a whole, and he is seen as responsible for his whole household, there is no explanation of how this purification would occur in practice. Likewise, there is little evidence for an understanding of the eucharist as a purifier before the third century. Much more prevalent are perspectives on the removal of sins, through individual and non-ritual repentance, and a voluntary change of heart and deeds; such repentance was conceptualized by some, such as *Hermas* and Valentinus, as a removal of demons from the heart and its resulting purification. *Hermas* and Clement of Alexandria both speak of repentance as closely linked to true knowledge, understanding, and self-discernment, but it is especially the latter who singled out knowledge as the main purificatory instrument for the aspiring individual.

The only significant dimension of purity discourse as regards sin on a communal level concerns restrictions for participation in the eucharist. Restrictions are discussed both in the *Didache*, which emphasizes the eucharist's sacrificial character, and in Paul, who does not; the *Didache* and Ignatius link these restrictions through purity language. The problem which recurs most as an obstacle to the eucharist/common meal (at least until the stories in the *Apocryphal Acts*, which focus on sexual sin) is quarrelling, lack of cohesion, and sectarianism in the community. Here defilement language is directed less at individual and more at social sins, which endanger the community with fragmentation.

# 7

# Sexual Defilement in Early Christian Texts

The importance of sexuality in early Christian purity discourse was not totally unique. As described in chapter 2, purity discourses and rituals also played an important role in the regulation of sexuality in contemporary Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures. However, Christian sexual purity discourse was unusual both in its intensity and in its dominance: as opposed to most contemporary cultures in which purity discourse was widely used for many issues (death, food, birth, various sins), in Christian writings sexual purity discourse gradually took precedence. This focus can already be seen in the first century in Paul's frequent usage of defilement imagery when discussing sexual sin. By the second century, many Christian voices advocated total sexual renunciation, an attitude which by the early fourth century was realized in the birth of monasticism in both Egypt and Syria. Other Christians of the same period upheld marriage, but strictly curtailed the function and the place of sexuality as part of family life, not to speak of sexual relations outside the bond of marriage or same-sex relations. Picking up on tropes from Second Temple literature (see above, pp. 46–7), sexuality in general and sexual sins in particular were reified as a defilement under the battle metaphor—a defilement which aligns with all that is evil, which therefore cannot be accommodated but must be totally eradicated.

These attitudes were accompanied by a focus on sexuality as the main dimension for articulating and controlling the relationships between the various components of the person. This focus and its significance for the ordering of Christian society are best summarized by Peter Brown:

> First, a muted but tenacious tendency to treat sexuality as a privileged ideogram of all that was most irreducible in the human will. Second: a marked tendency… to herald sexual renunciation as a privileged emblem of human freedom. Third:… a widespread tendency to regard the body itself, by reason of its sexual components, as a highly charged locus of choice, of admiration in its virgin state and of avoidance in its sexually active state.[1]

[1] Brown (1990), 481.

Christian writers discussing food and death sought mostly to present Christian practice as irrelevant to purity, or as purity practices relating only to the interior and not to the exterior of the body. When discussing the sexual realm, however, most writers did not hesitate to use purity language, and to implicate the whole body in this discourse. The first major question, once this trend is documented, is why it happened: why did Christian purity discourse coalesce specifically around sexual issues? Though there is voluminous scholarship on early Christian sexual discourse, it has not systematically studied the development of Christian purity language, identified to what extent such language reflects systemic understanding of sexual issues as purity issues, or assessed how this perspective may facilitate understanding of early Christian views of sexuality.[2]

## THE DEFILEMENT OF SEXUAL SIN IN PAUL'S EPISTLES

Sin and its management were at the center of Paul's writings. Sin (ἁμαρτία) as a general concept is discussed throughout the letters. Sin or sinners in general are usually not described as a defilement, or their removal as purification (such a description does occur in 2 Cor 6:14–7:1, a passage seen by many as an insertion, though not necessarily non-Pauline).[3] The discussions of a specific category of sin—that of sexual sin—are typically framed by such language, especially as regarding the impact of sexual sin on the individual and the community.

Paul discussed sexual issues at length. His views on questions of illicit sex (*πορνεία*), marriage, and celibacy were famously ambiguous, allowing widely differing interpretations by early Christians and by modern scholars. This ambiguity extends also to the role of purity and defilement in determining sexual issues. As this dimension of Paul's thought is extensively discussed in the scholarship, I will only outline the main points.

The basic Pauline stance, reiterated several times, is a total and stark condemnation of sexual sins, especially *πορνεία*. This condemnation appears most simply in "vice lists" of various sins, including (though not restricted to) sexual sins. From some of these lists, it is clear that impurity (ἀκαθαρσία; ἁγνεία is rarely used by Paul) designates a form of sexual sin; thus in Galatians (5:19): "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: *πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία*, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery…", and in 2 Corinthians (12:21): "I may have to mourn over many of those who previously sinned and have not repented of *ἀκαθαρσία, πορνεία*, and licentiousness."[4] The same sequence appears in

[2] An exception is the scholarship on Paul's writings, where many have acknowledged the key role of purity for understanding his ideas on sexuality: see references below, nn. 7, 12, 13, 20, as well as Newton (1985), 102–9; Gordon (1997); Klawans (2000), 150–6; Vahrenhorst (2008).

[3] Goulder (1994); Vahrenhorst (2008), 206–18.

[4] *ἀκαθαρσία* is clearly sexual also in Rom 1:24.

epistles of disputed Pauline authorship, Colossians (3:5) and Ephesians (4:19, 5:3–5).

An exposition of the functioning of πορνεία's impurity is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:3–6:

> (3) For this is the will of God, your sanctification (ἁγιασμός): that you abstain from πορνείας (4) that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself (*or:* how to control your own body) in holiness (ἁγιασμῷ) and honor, (5) not with lustful passion like the heathen who do not know God . . . (7) for God has not called us to ἀκαθαρσία, but in holiness (ἁγιασμῷ).

Impurity of sexual sin is opposed to holiness (ἁγιασμός). Sexual impurity characterizes the out-group, idolatrous non-believers, while holiness should be practiced by the in-group, the followers of Jesus. Holiness is expressed in the person's acquisition or control (κτᾶσθαι) of his "vessel" (σκεῦος), the ambiguity of which may be intentional, evoking an image of strict control of the borders of the body and/or the family unit paralleling the control over the borders of the group.[5] This conglomeration of ideas indicates that "holiness" here relates to a pure body, which is not defiled by illicit and uncontrolled sexual relations.[6]

The connection made in this passage between illicit sexual activity and the crossing of the group borders, akin to idolatry and expressing a lack of loyalty to God, is not a Pauline innovation and features widely in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX, and in Second Temple texts (though earlier texts spoke of Israel as the in-group, while Paul was speaking to a new, gentile community).[7] Nevertheless, in 1 Corinthians, Paul's most extensive discussion of sexuality, the focus on the body sets him apart from earlier writers.

In 1 Corinthians 5:11–13, relating to a case of incest in the Corinthian church, Paul demands of his readers "not to associate with πόρνοι . . . not even to eat with such a one," saying that the community must "purge (ἐξάρατε) the evil person from among you," thereby affirming the need to maintain a community pure of sexual sin.[8] This idea is provided with a theoretical basis in 1 Cor 6:15–19:

[5] For an interpretation of this passage in purity terms, see Thomas (2010).

[6] The same opposition of ἁγιασμός and ἀκαθαρσία appears in Rom 6:19, where sexuality is not explicitly mentioned; sexual sins and ἁγιασμός are contrasted in 1 Cor 6:19, where ἀκαθαρσία is not mentioned, but "washing" (ἀπελούσασθε)—probably referring to baptism—is.

[7] Hayes (2002), 19–103; Gaca (2003), 119–89; Knust (2006), 59–64; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 53–73; Thomas (2010).

[8] For an interpretation of this and subsequent passages as relating to maintaining firm social boundaries and preventing invasion of sexual sin into the pure community, see Martin (1995), 167–79. Martin demonstrates this concern of invasion throughout 1 Corinthians, and sees it as representing a conception of the healthy body as having strong borders, as opposed to a conception of health as a good balance between the body's components. While Martin's analysis is highly instructive, I hesitate to conflate disease and impurity to this extent: impurity appears to me to be an independent domain in Paul's thought.

> (15) Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a πόρνης? Never! (16) Do you not know that whoever is united to a πόρνης becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." (17) But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. (18) Shun πορνείαν. Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the πορνεύων sins against his own body. (19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?

Paul does not use terms of defilement in this passage. However, he identifies the believer's body as a locus of holiness—a member of the body of Christ as well as a temple for the Holy Spirit;[9] illicit sexual acts are totally incompatible with this, as they create a physical alliance with the πόρνης, affecting the sinner's body. Paul's description of the merging of bodies created through sexual contact (citing Gen 2:24) emphasizes the desecration of the holy body through physical contact with the πόρνης.[10] The body is not a neutral agent, which must be pure to come into contact with a sacred place; rather, it itself is sacred, and therefore must be protected from defilement. This focus on the body as the site of sin and as bearing its consequences was conducive to the later developments of sexual sin as a defilement of the individual body, although due to the lack of defilement terms in this passage it is difficult to ascribe this idea already to Paul himself.

The discussion of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, which had a huge influence on subsequent practice and thought, includes a number of possible pointers to Paul's understanding of the link between sexual practice and defilement. Here, however, the issue is not sexual sin but sexual relations within marriage.

As a response to the Corinthian position, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman," Paul argues that marriage is permitted, and sexual relations are an obligation of marital partners; nevertheless, temporary separation from sexual relations is allowed "to devote yourself to prayer (σχολάσητε τῇ προσευχῇ)" (1 Cor 7:5). Some scholars have seen here a background of purity concerns, according to which sex is incommensurate with religious activities.[11] The text itself, however, does not call for abstinence, use purity language, or indeed explain why prayer requires abstinence; it is probable that Paul means only that prayer requires leisure and an unoccupied mind.[12] Later in the chapter Paul states that virgins should not marry, but that neither should those already married be separated: here again he refrains from purity logic, which would probably require a more clear-cut position.

The single appearance of a defilement term in this chapter is when Paul denies its relevance. In the case of marriage with a non-believer, says Paul,

[9] For the body as temple of God's spirit, see also 1 Cor 3:16–17, 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16.
[10] Fisk (1996). [11] Poirier and Frankovic (1996); Vahrenhorst (2008), 173–5.
[12] See Thiselton (2000), 508–9; Deming (2004), 120–3; Beattie (2005), 23. For late ancient exegesis of this verse, see Clark (1999), 277–82.

the couple need not separate, "For the unbelieving husband is made holy (ἡγίασται) through his believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise your children would be impure (ἀκάθαρτά), but as it is, they are holy (ἅγιά)" (1 Cor 7:14). Defilement in this case results not from sexual sin, but from idolatry or disbelief of the partner; the connection between husband and wife transfers holiness from one to the other, overcoming the defilement which would have otherwise passed to the children. While the mechanism of sanctification or potential defilement is not specified, the reasoning of 1 Corinthians 6 discussed above implies that it is the result of the joining of bodies.[13]

Paul's views on the dangers of sexual sin are linked to his anthropology. The basic division of the person is between flesh and spirit.[14] "Flesh" for Paul is frequently (though not always) a negative term denoting aspects of the person which are inclined or lead to sin. Although not only sexual sins are linked with the flesh, these must have held a prime place in this regard (see their placement in Gal 5:19–21). "Flesh" and "spirit" are sometimes reified by Paul as cosmological forces residing not only inside but also outside the body.[15] Paul does not use impurity language to describe the opposition between flesh and spirit.[16] However, as Dale Martin suggests, his belief in a constant struggle between forces of evil and good and the identification of the forces of evil with a certain part of the person, would lead him to see sexual sin not only as dangerous but also as polluting, to the body of the believer and to the body of the community.[17] Moreover, the essentially dualist opposition between flesh and spirit together with the ambiguity of the meaning of "flesh" would lend itself to readers of Paul who sought to implement a harsher position towards sexuality.

Though Paul does not clearly define the impurity of sexual sin, it does go beyond an ad hoc usage, in which impurity simply means evil. Sexual impurity is opposed to holiness, rather than to purity; holiness becomes a broad term, including meanings traditionally associated with purity. This creates a simple dualist system, as the pure is now synonymous with the sacred and the common with the defiled. When speaking of sexual sin, there is no "middle ground" in which people can be pure but common.[18] A person has a stark and simple choice—either to be impure, sinful, and far from God, or to be holy, pure, and close to God. In this reduction of the system to only two options, some of the functions of purity and defilement are lost: the possibility for a dynamic of continual purification in response to occasional sin is barely recognized, and purity as an internal social hierarchy is not possible either.

[13] For recent discussions of this passage from a purity perspective, see Hayes (2002), 94–6; Hodge (2010); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 92–4. And compare 2 Cor 6:14–7:1.

[14] The opposition is clearly put forward in Rom 8:1–13, Gal 5:16–25, 6:8. See Jewett (1971), 49–166; Boyarin (1994), 57–85; Martin (1995), 168–74.

[15] Rom 7:5. [16] Though see Rom 6:19, Gal 6:8. [17] Martin (1995), 212–17.

[18] See for this point Vahrenhorst (2008), 129, 166–7; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 79–81.

Despite the relative paucity of purity terms in Paul's writing on sexual sin, many scholars have concluded that sexual sin is seen by Paul through a purity prism, based on a juxtaposition of the anthropological model presented in 1 Corinthians 6–7, the few appearances of purity terms, and the Jewish contexts and parallels to Paul's images. They argue that sexual sin is perceived as defiling the holiness of the community and the individual, and that the terms of impurity used are not just rhetorical flourishes to drive home his condemnation of such practices.[19] Furthermore, attempts have been made to categorize Paul's sexual impurity using the "ritual" and "moral" categories. Marcel Simon already suggested that Paul's understanding of πορνεία crossed the lines between ritual and moral purity.[20] However, Simon did not clarify what he means by "ritual" and "moral," nor how Paul's view differs from the views of earlier Jewish writers. Jonathan Klawans states that Paul's understanding of sexual sin is completely in line with biblical and Second Temple conceptions of "moral impurity," and is not ritual at all; this is proved by the lack of any purification ritual (he does not consider baptism as such a ritual, since it is one-time only).[21] However, Christine Hayes has pointed out that Paul's impurity discourse is innovative, and is difficult to describe through categories of moral and ritual: it is caused by intentional sin and not some unintended contagion, but nevertheless functions through the physical, individual body, is transmitted from flesh to flesh, and is purified through a once-in-a-lifetime bodily ritual, baptism. Hayes therefore coins the term "carnal impurity" to describe Paul's sexual sin impurity, which is not clearly "moral" or "ritual" and which focuses upon the body of the believer.[22]

Paul's writings on sexual purity and his ambiguous statements concerning marriage had a decisive influence on second-century discussions of marriage and sexual asceticism. Throughout the second century, there were two main trends in practice and thought regarding sexuality. Representatives of both trends used purity language and concepts to speak about sexuality and the body, but in quite different ways.

Writers of the first trend integrated Stoic and Jewish sexual ethics into the churches, upholding marriage as an essential social institution but severely regulating and limiting the place of sexuality in marriage. They emphasized social values of authority, hierarchy, and control, together with personal values of self-control and honesty. These values and their implementation were in turn cast as differentiating between pure Christians and defiled pagans, as the latter were portrayed as addicted to promiscuity and disregard of the marriage

[19] For references, see above, n. 7. [20] Simon (1967). [21] Klawans (2000), 153–4.

[22] Hayes (2002), 96 and 254 nn. 16, 17. Thomas (2010) suggests that this new type of impurity was influenced by the impurity model found in some contemporary Greek Sacred Laws, which specified requirements of purification following sexual sins such as adultery. The suggestion is attractive, but Paul's language of abomination and horror of such sins is much closer to Second Temple Period texts than to the dry prescriptions of the *sacrae leges*.

bond. Inside this current, however, there was some variety concerning the valuation of sexual activity in marriage.

The second trend rejected sexuality and marriage altogether, championing celibacy and virginity as an alternative to family life, ideas which were opposed to the dominant morality of the Greco-Roman world as well as to that found in most contemporary Jewish texts. Sexuality was seen as the embodiment of all that was evil on the personal, social, and cosmic level, and abstinence from it as the best method to overcome such evil. In this case, it is virginity or the rejection of sexuality in general that is seen as "Christian" and opposed to pagan or even Jewish society and morals.[23] There is, however, significant variety among writers of this trend in the degree of implementation of these ideals of virginity and/or celibacy.

## PURE HEARTS, PURE BODIES

### The *Shepherd of Hermas*

The *Shepherd of Hermas* opens with a depiction of a sexual sin of the heart: Hermas sees his former owner naked, and has a passing thought of desire for her. He is then berated for this "wickedness and impurity (ἀκάθαρτα)" in visions, and told that such a sin is especially grave when it occurs in the heart of "Hermas the self-controlled (ἐγκρατής), who abstains from every evil desire and is full of all simplicity and great innocence."[24] As seen above, Hermas is interested in the internal, psychological dimension of sin and repentance. Accordingly, as opposed to the household codes, Hermas presents a less social and more psychological angle on sexual purity in early second-century Rome.[25]

Though the interplay of spirits in the heart is Hermas' main vehicle to express sin and repentance, other images are also present. Thus *Similitudes* 5.7 speaks of the flesh rather than evil spirits and focuses on sexual sin: "Guard this flesh of yours to keep it pure and undefiled (καθαρὰν καὶ ἀμίαντον), that the spirit dwelling in it may bear a good testimony to it, and your flesh may be made upright… If you defile your flesh, you will also defile the Holy Spirit as well; and if you defile your flesh, you will not live."[26] Though there is no indication

[23] I owe this general picture to Pagels (1983). Gaca (2003) speaks of three main positions in early Christian communities—encratite, proto-orthodox, and more libertine positions (much less common than the first two). Gasparro (1995), 127–46, followed by Hunter (2007), uses a typology of "moderate" vs. "radical" encratic trends in the second and third centuries.

[24] *Hermas*, *Vis.* 1.2.4; Ehrman, II.180–1.

[25] For sexual issues in *Hermas*, see Brown (1988), 69–72; Trevett (2006), 125–33.

[26] Ehrman, II.336–7. A similar expression is found in *2 Clem.* 8.6–9.3 (Ehrman I.176–8): "Keep the flesh pure (ἁγνήν), and the seal of baptism undefiled (ἄσπιλον)… we must guard the flesh as a temple of God."

what exactly such defilement or purity would mean in practice, the focus on flesh makes it probable that sexual sin is the referent. *Mandates* 4 shows that honorable marriage would not have been considered defiled; although a widow should not remarry.[27]

Ἐγκράτεια and the ceasing of ἐπιθυμία are one of the main objectives of the transformation Hermas is called to undergo.[28] It is difficult to tell whether these terms refer to the sexual sphere or to a general moral stance concerning also desire for food, luxury, and the like. Some passages, however, discuss sexual issues explicitly, with terms such as πορνεία, flesh, and ἁγνεία, such as *Mandates* 4.1: "I command you to guard your ἁγνεία and not to let any thought to rise up in your heart about someone else's wife, or about πορνεία, or any other similarly wicked things."[29] After a discussion of divorce following adultery, he adds: "not only is it adultery to defile (μιάνῃ) one's flesh, but whoever does things similar to what the gentiles (ἔθνεσιν) do commits adultery."[30] The chapter concludes with a call to "preserve ἁγνείαν and reverence," and a promise that if Hermas does so, the speaking angel would "dwell in your house." Here ἁγνεία means to maintain a heart pure of sexual desire, as part of married life; adultery functions as a catch-all term for various illicit sexual activities, characterized as defilements of the flesh and associated with non-believers. There appears to be little innovation in the ideas and terminology of *Mandate* 4.1, which are closely related to Pauline sexual purity tropes. However, the focus on the heart as a location for the various passions and for purity and defilement, as well as the angel's promise of indwelling, are significant in light of the complex demonology and anthropology *Hermas* develops.

## The *Gospel of Thomas*: singleness and purity

Many scholars regard the *Gospel of Thomas* as a text of encratite tendencies.[31] This understanding is supported by an interpretation of a number of logia speaking of the importance of being "alone" or "single," and of the blessedness of the childlike state. The most explicit of these is logion 22:

> Jesus said to them: "When you make the two into one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below—that is, to make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female will not be female… then you will enter [the kingdom]."

[27] *Man*. 4.4. See the sisterly relations with women in *Vis*. 2.2 and *Sim*. 9.11; on hints to the value of celibacy in *Hermas*, see Deming (2004), 40–2; Trevett (2006), 125–33.
[28] Lipsett (2011), 19–23.
[29] *Hermas*, *Man*. 4.1.1–3; trans. adapted from Ehrman, II.244–5.
[30] *Hermas, Man*. 4.1.9, Ehrman II.246–7.
[31] See Uro (1998); Valantasis (1999).

Many scholars believe that for the *Gospel of Thomas*, this singleness recreated the singleness of the androgynous Adam before the separation into two sexes following the Fall, which was essentially a sexual sin; the attainment of such singleness requires a life of renunciation, including celibacy.[32] Other interpretations of *Thomas* are certainly possible, however; some scholars have pointed out that the *Gospel of Thomas* does not relate to sexual renunciation explicitly, only to "singleness" and non-specificity of gender, and therefore may not relate to sexuality but rather to the human condition of being separated from some true, primal selfhood.[33] Indeed, different interpretations of logion 22 or very similar sayings were already current in the second century; Clement of Alexandria cites Julius Cassian as using a similar saying from the *Gospel of the Egyptians* to support an ideology of total celibacy, *2 Clement* cites it to support a more mundane sexual ethic, that "brother seeing sister may have no thought concerning her as female," while Clement of Alexandria himself interprets it symbolically as relating to the extinguishing of anger and desire in the rational person.[34] Furthermore, the practical import of *Thomas*' ideology is not at all clear; following an analysis of the main points, Risto Uro concludes that "in spite of the clear ascetic inclination . . . one can recognize a certain ambiguity in Thomas' relation to the issue of marriage versus celibacy . . . [which] perhaps reflects an ongoing discussion on the matter in Thomas' community."[35]

My question is different: does the *Gospel of Thomas* articulate ideas of sexual purity or defilement? It appears that the answer is negative. Ideas of doubleness/singleness of the person, or harmony between various parts of the person, are not identical to ideas of defilement/purity of the person. In the former, the focus is on the person's interior: the ideal, original state of the person is lack of differentiation, and corruption comes through differentiation into various aspects. This corruption is expressed in many texts through sexual differentiation of the primeval, singular Adam into male and female. On the ethical or psychological level, this differentiation is reflected in double-heartedness, lack of harmony between the "inner" and the "outer" person or lack of a decisive decision to be loyal to God alone. In conceptions of purity and defilement the focus is on the borders of the person, which are defiled when they are breached or in danger. In this case, sexual defilement is seen as invading the person from the outside; on the ethical level, the problem is with adherence to some external source of defilement, or lack of sufficient border maintenance.[36]

[32] Klijn (1962); Quispel (1981); Gasparro (1984), 79–86; DeConick (1996), 3–1, 129–147. See the general discussion of themes of unification and singleness in Meeks (1973), esp. 194–6.

[33] See Buckley (1985) and discussion in Uro (1998).

[34] *Strom*. 3.93; *2 Clem.* 12.5 (Ehrman 182–3) with Le Boulluec (2007). The image of the female becoming male and vice versa can even connote sexual relations, as in the Corpus Hermeticum, *Asclepius* 21.3; see Mahé (1975).

[35] Uro (1998), 161.

[36] For a similar differentiation between conceptions of interior corruption and of exterior invasion, see Martin (1995); for Martin, however, the ideal person or society according to the first

## The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles

The early Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles—the *Acts of Paul*, *of Andrew*, *of John*, *of Peter*, and *of Thomas*—are commonly seen as the quintessential expression of extreme sexual asceticism, though this understanding has been tempered in recent scholarship.[37] Thus Davies, for example, says that the Apocryphal Acts are "products of communities of sexually continent Christians." The most revealing passage in the Acts relating to sexual continence is the well-known first speech of Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*; this speech is entitled "the word of God concerning abstinence (ἐγκρατείας) and the resurrection" and consists of thirteen macarisms:

> 1. Blessed are the pure (καθαροί) in heart, for they shall see God. 2. Blessed are they who have kept the flesh pure (ἁγνήν), for they shall become a temple of God. 3. Blessed are they that abstain (ἐγκρατεῖς), for to them will God speak. 4. Blessed are they who have renounced this world, for they shall be well pleasing unto God. 5. Blessed are they who have wives as if they had them not, for they shall be heirs to God…
>
> 13. Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well pleasing to God, and shall not lose the reward of their purity (ἁγνείας), for the word of the Father shall be for them a work of salvation in the day of his Son, and they shall have rest forever and ever.[38]

These thirteen macarisms create a clear unit.[39] The placing of issues of sexual purity at the beginning and at the end, as well as their numerical dominance, indicates their importance for the author. The first macarism, identical to that of Matthew 5:8, receives here a different meaning when it is appended to the others and serves as the basis for a series of sayings on sexual purity. Purity of heart is implicitly tied to purity of flesh (a link reminiscent of that made in the *Shepherd of Hermas* or even the *Epistle by Polycarp*, which speaks of the virgins' "pure conscience"). These purities are linked to ἐγκράτεια and renunciation of the world, explained through the further link to "possessing wives as though they have them not," a near quote of 1 Corinthians 7:29, thus anchoring the series in a Pauline source. The import of sexual purity is explained in the second clause of each sentence: it will enable the believer to have a close relationship with God,

conception is one in which there is a proper hierarchic relationship between components, and not one in which there is monolithic simplicity or singleness.

[37] For an "encratite" attribution, see Davies (1980). Davies approaches sexuality in the Apocryphal Acts from the social perspective; the issue is analyzed from a folkloric perspective by MacDonald (1983), and more rigorously and from a feminist angle by Burrus (1987); from the perspective of its relation to humankind's original purity and future resurrection by Gasparro (1984), 87–100. For additional bibliography, see Barrier (2009), 84 n.14. For the *Acts of Thomas*, see Tissot (1981), 109–19; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 101–2.

[38] *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 5; trans. adapted from Schneemelcher, 239–40.

[39] For a close reading, see Barrier (2009), 78–85.

through seeing, speaking, or inheriting him, or becoming a temple for him.[40] The unit ends with an unusual blessing for the pure bodies of the virgins, who will be recompensed in the resurrection. The whole passage speaks of the close connection between sexual purity of the body and closeness to God, a closeness achieved through knowledge of God and some sort of revelation or prophecy in the present and the resurrection of the body in the (near) future.[41]

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* almost universally uses positive purity language and does not speak of sexuality as defilement. One exception is the accusation of two of Paul's enemies that Paul defrauds women by saying: "You have no resurrection otherwise, except if you remain pure (ἁγνοί), and do not defile (μολύνητε) the flesh but keep it pure (ἁγνήν)" (12). Paul himself phrases this more generally in a speech before the proconsul (17): he was sent to "sever men from corruption (φθορᾶς) and uncleanness (ἀκαθαρσίας) and all pleasure and death, that they may sin no more."

A similar ethos to that of the macarisms is found in the concluding speech of the *Acts of John*.[42] John thanks God for preventing him from marrying in order to remain consecrated for a godly life, saying, "you kept me also till this present hour pure for yourself (καθαρὸν ἑαυτῷ) and untouched by union with a woman…[you] disclosed to me the repugnance of even looking closely at a woman…"[43] The defilement of even the slightest contact with a woman would make impossible John's godly status and mission, and especially his spiritual sight; only because God rid him of the "foul madness (ῥυπαρᾶς μανίας) that is in the flesh…the bitter death…the secret disease of my soul…him that raised tumult in me" could John have an intimate, total, "spotless (ἄσπιλόν)," "undoubting" relationship with God, in which he knew him "with purity (καθαράν)."[44]

István Czachesz points to the focus in this text on the purification of the person in order to achieve mystical sight of God, and suggests that it was

[40] The connection of renunciation and intimate knowledge of God is continued in the next group of macarisms, 6–11.

[41] These same elements—purity, abstinence, fear of sin, possession of the holy spirit, and resurrection—are listed by Pineḥas b. Yair, a second-century rabbi, in a short passage of spiritual guidance (*m. Sotah* 9:15); purity, knowledge of God, and resurrection appear in *1QH* 19:10–14. See Lawrence (2006), 127–9. DeConick (1996), 143 n. 52, believes that purification as a prerequisite for mystical ascent is the original meaning of Matt 5:8, deriving from Jewish mystical ideas expressed in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, and the *Hekhalot* literature.

[42] For sexual asceticism in the *Acts of John*, see Lalleman (1998), 231–44.

[43] *Acts of John* 113.

[44] *Ibid*. Stronger language is found in the fragment of the *Acts of John* in the *Pseudo-Titus Epistle* (Schneemelcher [1974], 65). Here John speaks of the virgin body as "clean" and "untouched," while those who consent to conjugal union are "caught in corruption," "soiled by Satan": "[sexual union] is a device of the serpent…a gift of death, a work of destruction, a teaching of division…an unclean fruit of parturition, a shedding of blood, a passion in the mind, a falling from reason, a token of punishment, an instruction of pain, an operation of fire." The authenticity of this fragment is disputed, however; see Gasparro (1984), 100–1; Lalleman (1998), 236–8. To me it appears quite singular in its language and symbolism, and therefore suspect.

appended to other traditions about John in early third-century Alexandria;[45] this is unlikely, however, as we have seen that similar themes were already found in the *Acts of Paul of Thecla*. Special sexual behavior is here demanded only of John as an apostle with a unique relationship with God, and not of all the baptized.[46] Whatever its influences, this passage clearly perceives any defiled sexual contact to be totally and permanently incompatible with a pure mystical experience of God; purification of this sexual defilement is achieved only though divine assistance.

In the *Acts of Peter*, partly extant in Coptic, "defilement," "corruption," and "shame" describe illicit sexual relations, and not married sex.[47] At the same time, some women are persuaded by Peter's "preaching of purity" to "remain in purity from intercourse" with their husbands, in order to "worship God in sobriety and purity."[48] Here we see a tendency, discussed below, to map virginity on the purity pole, while acts of πορνεία (and not sexual relations in general) are mapped on the defilement pole.

The *Acts of Andrew* and the *Acts of Thomas*, usually dated later than the other Acts to the beginning of the third century, are more extreme in that they describe sexual relations directly as defiled, not only for the apostle but also for his audience. The narrative of the *Acts of Andrew*, interspersed with many speeches, is built around the apostle's persuasion of Maximilla to leave her husband. Andrew's speeches to Maximilla feature a number of descriptions of sexuality: "I know…that you are moved to resist the whole allurement of sexual intercourse, because you wish to be separated from a polluted and foul way of life (μυσαροῦ βίου καὶ ῥυπαροῦ)";[49] "Keep yourself henceforth chaste and pure, holy, undefiled, sincere, free from adultery," Andrew prays for Maximilla (16), "…may the soul in her remain pure (καθαρά), sanctified by your name; but especially protect her, Lord, from this foul defilement (τοῦ μιαροῦ τούτου μιάσματος),"[50] while Maximilla herself prays to be delivered from the "unclean union (μιαρᾶς μίξεως) with Aegeates" and to remain "pure and chaste (καθαρὰν καὶ σώφρονα), serving God alone" (14).[51] The speeches take a strongly dualistic stance, opposing the heavenly world, the immaterial soul or intellect, and the "true nature of man," on the one hand, with earthly existence, the materiality of the body, the devil and sexuality, on the other.

The *Acts of Thomas*, probably the latest among the Apocryphal Acts and originally written in Syriac, not in Greek, shares many of the characteristics of

[45] Czachesz (2006). [46] Lalleman (1998), 235.

[47] Berlin Coptic Papyrus 8502 (trans. Schneemelcher [1989], 285).

[48] *Acts of Peter* 33–4 (*Martyrdom of Peter*, 4–5; trans. Schneemelcher [1989], 311).

[49] *Codex Vaticanus* 808.5; trans. Schneemelcher, 129. [50] Trans. Schneemelcher 139.

[51] Aegeates himself, despite his demonization as a "snake" and "devil" who is addicted to sensual pleasure, is glad at first that his wife is σωφροσύνη and is loyal to him. Thus σωφροσύνη is a term which can be used by both sides of the conflict. Aegeates also seems to accept Maximilla's contention that "It is not right for a man's mouth to touch a woman's mouth after prayer"; apparently this is something that the author thought that even an evil pagan would agree with.

these texts. Restriction of sexuality, expressed as purity, is central to the text: as stated by A. F. J. Klijn, for the *Acts of Thomas* "the most important quality of man is his or her purity."[52] Here too sexual contact, even in marriage, is deemed impure: it is described as filthy (ῥυπαρᾶς), defiled (μιαρᾷ), and corrupted, "a deed of shame and confusion," opposed to the "purity of the Messiah."[53] Sexual renunciation is described as the removal of corruption and of disease from within the person,[54] or as the shedding of dirty clothes,[55] while σωφροσύνη/ܥܦܝܦܘܬܐ or ἁγνεία/ܥܦܝܦܘܬܐ denote living with a wife in continence.[56] Through rejection of sexuality a person can become a pure temple,[57] fit to enter before the king.[58] Corruptible marriage to a physical, temporal husband produces only troublesome children and sins, while incorruptible marriage to the true, heavenly husband, Jesus, produces spiritual fruits and immortality.[59] Arresting sexuality opens the way for soteriological self-knowledge, an understanding of humankind's true state.[60]

Nevertheless, many of Thomas' sermons are set against πορνεία or adultery, not sexual relations in general.[61] This discrepancy leads Yves Tissot and Naomi Koltun-Fromm, against H. J. W. Drijvers, to argue for two essentially incompatible sources in the *Acts of Thomas*: an earlier and more traditional one in which marriage is allowed and πορνεία is the focus, and a later one for which all sexual contact is defiled.[62] I do not find their argument persuasive: as we saw, other Apocryphal Acts (and other writings of the second century) commonly speak of pure virginity as opposed to defiled πορνεία, and there is no reason that one author could not condemn both sexuality in general and πορνεία, or adultery, in particular. This is exactly the position which Thomas is said to have advocated: "Whosoever shall partake in the polluted union (κοινωνήσῃ τῇ μιαρᾷ / ܡܢ ܕܢܫܬܬܦ ܥܦܝܦܘܬܐ), and especially in adultery, he shall not have life with the God whom I preach."[63] It is true that in *Thomas* the conflation of πορνεία and conjugal sex is even more extreme than in most of the Apocryphal Acts, since (together with the *Acts of Andrew*) it uses the negative defilement pole for both πορνεία and conjugal sex; and at times, it seems that both are equally rejected, though this is nowhere said explicitly.[64]

[52] Klijn (2003), 11. See especially the lengthy praise of purity in *Acts of Thomas* 85 and 94 (an expansion of the macarisms of the *Acts of Paul*).

[53] *Acts of Thomas* 12–14, 51–2, 54–5, 84, 88. [54] *Ibid*. 124, 144. [55] *Ibid*. 126.

[56] *Ibid*. 150; perhaps 51, according to Klijn (2003), 128. I am not persuaded by the interpretation of Koltun-Fromm (2010), 111–12, that ἁγνεία in this pericope indicates a marriage which includes sexual relations.

[57] *Acts of Thomas* 12, 87, 156. [58] *Ibid*. 126.

[59] *Ibid*. 14, 124. For an overview of the *Acts of Thomas*' attitude to sexuality, see Klijn (2003), 53–5.

[60] *Acts of Thomas* 15. [61] *Ibid*. 28, 84.

[62] Tissot (1988); Koltun-Fromm (2010), 97–126.

[63] *Acts of Thomas* 51. I see no reason to interpret, with Koltun-Fromm (2010), 111–12, "the impure union" here as *porneia*, especially in light of the definite article.

[64] Many interpreters explain that since the true bridegroom is Jesus, any other relationship is essentially adulterous. This is a logical conclusion, but does not appear in the text, which retains

Furthermore, I do not find in the Apocryphal Acts in general or in the *Acts of Thomas* in particular any preoccupation with the origin of sexuality in the Fall, as Pagels, among others, believes.[65] The purpose of the *Acts of Thomas* is to persuade its readers to live a life in which sexual relations play a lesser role: it is less interested in defining exactly to what extent each act is prohibited, or in explaining the origin for the defilement of sex (though at times it is insinuated that the demons have something to do with it, as with other sins); rather, it demonstrates its evil consequences and opposes it to a life of holiness and marriage with Jesus.

The Pseudo-Clementine *Epistles to Virgins* provide a window into the lives of those who followed the precepts of the *Apocryphal Acts* to the full. Commonly sourced to third-century Syria, the *Epistles* are an exhortation to virgins for proper and saintly behavior, reflecting a context of rivalries between different groups of itinerant male virgins.[66]

The sexual precepts of the first Epistle are quite general. Virgins of both genders must conquer the body, the flesh, and Satan (I.5); they are the city and temple of God, there is nothing in them of the mind of the flesh. However, this is only if they imitate Christ and the apostles, all holy people "who cherished and loved purity (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ), and ran in the contest, and finished their course without blemish (ἀσπίλως ἐτέλεσαν / ܒܠܝ ܡܘܡ ܫܠܡܘ)" (I.6). A virgin must be "holy in both body and spirit… waiting upon the Lord always in purity and holiness (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܒܦܓܪܐ ܘܒܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ) in the Spirit of God… living purely and without stain (καθαρῶς καὶ ἀμιάντως / ܒܟܝܢܘܬܐ ܘܒܠܝ ܟܬܡܐ)" (I.7). The place of virgins is better than that of "those who have passed a wedded life in purity (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܥܒܪܘ ܒܥܠܡܐ), and whose bed has not been defiled (ܘܠܐ ܐܬܛܢܦ ܒܗܘܢ ܡܫܟܒܐ). For God will give to virgins the kingdom of heaven, as to the holy angels" (I.4). Though virginity is clearly preferred, both marriage and virginity are marked with the term ܩܕܝܫܐ (purity/holiness). This would indicate an ethic similar to that of the closely contemporary *Acts of Thomas*, which sees both marriage and virginity as compatible with the holy life.[67]

The second Epistle contains more practical detail relating to the proper behavior of wandering male virgins, who acted as preachers and exorcists. This

some ambivalence on the relationship between adultery and marital sex. See Davies (1980), 84; Pagels (1983), 174 n. 8; Koltun-Fromm (2010), 121.

[65] Pagels (1983), 158; Gasparro (1984), 87–101. The only relatively clear statement to this effect is found in the the *Acts of Andrew* (5–7), which sees Maximilla's conversion as a "repentance" from the "affliction" of Eve. *Acts of Thomas* 32 relates the actions of the serpent/Satan through history, starting with the Fall; Adam is said simply to have "transgressed God's commandment." Although the Devil "bound them [= the angels] in lust for women," it is sins of anger and rebellion rather than sexual sins which feature in the devil's machinations. I do not find with Klijn (2003), 54, the idea of a virgin Adam in paradise in *Acts of Thomas* 15.

[66] The *Epistles* are fully extant only in Syriac translation, edited by Beelen (1856), but substantial Greek fragments have also been found, ed. Diekamp and Funk (1913). For the date, see Harnack (1891); Brown (1988), 196 n. 32. For rivalry, see *Epistles to Virgins* I.10–11.

[67] See above, p. 161.

behavior was to be of "chastity and holiness" (ܥܦܝܦܘܬܐ ܘܩܕܫܐ),[68] expressed mostly in separation from women during their travels. Although their mission included preaching to women, they were never to sleep, eat, or drink in the same place as a lone woman, especially unmarried; a woman should not wait upon them, wash their feet, or anoint them (II.1–3). Therefore, the virgins should take great care in organizing their sleeping and eating arrangements. The ideal segregation is expressed most poignantly in the instructions for the salutation following prayer with women: "the women and the maidens will wrap their hands in their garments; and we also, with circumspection and with all chastity, our eyes looking upwards, shall wrap our right hand in our garments; and then they will come and give us a salutation on our right hand (ܝܡܝܢܐ ܥܠ ܠܒܫܐ ܕܝܕܢ) wrapped in our garments" (II.2).[69] Both touch and sight must be prevented. The separation between the sexes is extended to examples from the Old Testament: Moses, Aaron, and Joshua all ministered before God without women present. When travelling in the desert, the Israelites made sure that the women walked in the rear, apart from the men, "that there might be no disorder on account of the women" (II.4).[70]

## Summary

The authors discussed in this section make frequent and extensive use of defilement imagery for sexuality; however, the degree of specificity of this language varies widely. In certain cases, it appears that purity language simply emphasizes the main message of these texts: that sexual activity in general, and sexual sin in particular, are hazardous to the soul and the body, and totally inimical to a person's contact with God.

Other texts are more specific. The *Shepherd of Hermas* envisions the heart and the flesh as places for inhabitation by the Holy Spirit or contamination by the evil spirits, a dynamic in which sexual sin plays a central role; Tatian also speaks of the person as a temple for the holy spirit, contaminated by any sexuality. Many of the texts link sexual purity with knowledge of God, and vice versa. For the opening speech of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, virgins, or even people "who have wives as though they have not," are pure in heart, in flesh and in body; essentially, it is the whole person who is seen as pure or defiled. The Pseudo-Clementine *Epistles to Virgins*, while not providing a clear anthropology, are among the few texts which translate the general sexual ethic of purity into detailed precepts for male virgins to follow. Some of the texts bifurcate the

[68] A recurring expression: *Epistles to Virgins* II.6, 8, 11, 15.

[69] The salutation has been interpreted by some as a kiss (Penn (2005), 83); however, it would seem as likely to be some kind of handshake.

[70] To the best of my knowledge, this interpretation of the walking order of the Israelite tribes (Numbers 2) as segregating women and men is unique.

person into body and soul and see the former as a source of contamination for the latter (e.g., *Acts of John*, *Epistles to Virgins*). For others, however, the body does not appear a source of contamination, but as an object of contamination by sexuality no less than the soul; it is therefore the person as a whole who is subject to sexual purity or defilement.

## THE PROTOLOGICAL DIMENSION: FROM MARCION TO THE SETHIANS

The impurity discourse of sexuality among early Christian communities had significant expression also in myths on the origin and creation of sexuality and sexual sin, which attributed the original development of sexuality to evil powers. These myths and the accompanying valuation of sexuality were strongly attacked by other Christian writers as dualist and antithetical to the notion of a single, good creator god. Nevertheless, their impact went well beyond gnostic circles, influencing the general Christian impurity discourses of the second and third centuries.

### Marcion, Cassian, Saturninus

The Marcionite church which flourished between the second and the fourth centuries in Syria and the East totally repudiated marriage, and withheld baptism and eucharist from married people, requiring them to separate, abstain, or wait until widowed.[71] These practices may have been derived from the teachings of Marcion, a shadowy second-century figure. The authors from whom information on Marcion is derived—Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, and Hippolytus—all claim that this behavior stemmed from his cosmological conception of an "evil" or "just" creator, responsible for the corporeal human condition and the social order of this world, as opposed to a good, highest god, who sent a non-fleshly Christ to release the world from the creator's hold. Marriage and procreation are collaboration with the evil god, filling the world he made; continence, on the other hand, "distresses the Creator, by repudiation of the things made or ordained by him."[72] As Andrew McGowan demonstrated, hatred for *matter* as of itself is rarely cited as a reason for Marcion's sexual abstinence; rather, abstinence is an attempt to subvert the plans of the creator

[71] Tertullian, *Marc.* 1.29; 4.11; 4.34. For additional sources see Harnack (1924), 148–51; 277*. On Marcion's asceticism/encratism in general, see Brown (1988), 86–90.

[72] Hippolytus, *Haer.* 10.19; Clement, *Strom.* 3.12; 3.25.

god.[73] Nevertheless, there is evidence for aversion of the body as a part of creation which must be denied (as opposed to matter in general): according to Tertullian, Marcionites described it as "earthly," "packed with dung," "foul from the excrement of the earth," "a sewer."[74] Marriage and sex are "corruption" or "impure," or simply "evil."[75] Nevertheless, the evilness of sex is more frequently linked to its procreative results, and not to the evilness or impurity of the flesh.

The views of another second-century figure, Julius Cassian, are transmitted via brief citations and lengthy paraphrases and polemics of Clement of Alexandria.[76] Cassian completely rejected marriage and sexuality, perceiving them as πορνεία.[77] He argued that the sexual organs have not been created by the God "to whom we seek to attain," since that same God "pronounced eunuchs blessed."[78] Sexual relations and birth are synonymous with corruption and are the result of the deceit of the serpent, who "took it from the irrational animals."[79] Prior to the sin of Adam and Eve, bodies and therefore sexual differentiation and sexual acts did not exist: " 'The coats of skins' in Cassian's view are bodies."[80] The soul "having become female by desire has come down here from above to birth and corruption," a view that Clement describes as Platonic.[81]

The extant fragments and paraphrases of Cassian rarely contain explicit impurity terms, though "corruption" (φθορά) is quite frequently used to describe birth or the body;[82] in a rare counter-example, Clement ascribed to the anti-marriage party in general the view that "relations are impure (μιαράν)."[83] Nevertheless, the anthropology and theology of Cassian would support a general view of the human body and sexuality as impure: these elements of the person are unessential, secondary, and externally derived. The body defiles the soul, which is the true human essence. The only way to be purified is therefore to minimize the role of the body, through the minimization of sexual activity.

Yet another figure mentioned by the patristic authors is Saturninus. According to Irenaeus, he believed that man is a combined creation of the superior power (who gave it the spark of life) and of seven angels, one of whom is the God of the Jews (who together created the rest of the body and psyche).[84] Furthermore, there are two human races, "one wicked and one good," and only the latter, those who are saved by an "ungendered, incorporeal" Christ, have in them the spark of life, while the former are assisted by demons.[85] Irenaeus then adds that "to

[73] McGowan (2001); though see Clement, *Strom.* 3.12.
[74] Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.10–11; 4.21; *Res.* 4; *Carn. Chr.* 4.
[75] Hippolytus, *Haer.* 10.19; Clement, *Strom.* 3.46; Tertullian, *Marc.* 1.29.
[76] Citations: *Strom.* 3.91–2; paraphrases: *Strom.* 3.93–105. For discussions of Cassian's views, difficult to disentangle from those of Marcion and Tatian in Clement's polemic, see Beatrice (1978); Pearson (1981), 101–20; Gasparro (1984), 32–55; Le Boulluec (2007); Hunter (2007), 106–11.
[77] *Strom.* 3.90. [78] *Strom.* 3.91–2. [79] *Strom.* 3.94; 3.104.
[80] *Strom.* 3.95. [81] *Strom.* 3.93.
[82] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.28.1; 10.19; Clement, *Strom.* 3.93–4; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 10.19.
[83] *Strom.* 3.46; trans. Chadwick and Oulton, 61–2.
[84] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.1. [85] *Ibid.* 1.24.2.

marry and beget children comes from Satan, and most of his followers abstain from animal food, misleading many by this false type of temperance."[86] It is important to note that while sexual activity is from Satan and was presumably abstained from as well (though this is not explicit), no aspect of the human body or soul is said to be the creation of Satan.

Bentley Layton points to the extensive parallels between Irenaeus' summary and second-century formulations of these myths found in the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Reality of the Rulers*, to which I will now turn.[87]

## Creation myths from Nag Hammadi

The *Apocryphon of John*, rewriting the story of Genesis, gives an important role to two sexual acts of the first humans.[88] In the first act, the demiurge Ialdabaoth (also known as Saklas or Samael), after casting Adam down into the material world of deadly pleasures, "defiled" or "seduced" Eve; from this Cain and Abel, rulers of the material world, were born (24.15). The text then explains (24.26–32):

> And to the present day sexual intercourse, which originated from the first ruler, has remained. And in the female who belonged to Adam it sowed a seed of desire;[89] and by sexual intercourse it raised up birth in the image of the bodies. And it supplied them some of its counterfeit spirit.

Sexual intercourse and desire originated from Ialdabaoth-Saklas-Samael, and their function is to multiply bodies; the counterfeit spirit put in humans, closely connected with sexuality, is opposed to the holy spirit coming from above. Ialdabaoth's leonine features and association with fire elsewhere in the text also serve to link it with sexual desire. Furthermore, the snake (identified as one of the rulers) is said to have taught Adam and/or Eve to "consume imperfection consisting of the sowing (or, less literally: of procreation) of desire for corruption" (22.12).

Immediately afterwards, however, Adam is said to "have known the image of his own prior acquaintance,"[90] from which Seth, the father of the "immovable race" was born, with the assistance of Sophia's spirit. Was this a physical sexual act? If not—was Seth only a spiritual being?[91] Karen King believes that this was

[86] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.2.; trans. Unger, I.85.

[87] Layton (1987), 159–62.

[88] The text also describes the creation of the various divine entities as acts of sexual procreation. Although these have bearing on the valuation of sexuality, it is difficult to transfer their meaning from the divine to the human realm, and therefore I focus on the Genesis stories involving humans. See Stroumsa (1984), 35–70; Gilhus (2005).

[89] Thus in the Nag Hammadi manuscripts II and IV; in BG and III, sexual desire is planted in Adam.

[90] 24.34; in manuscript III, "He knew his own lawlessness."

[91] For this problem, see Stroumsa (1984), 38–40.

indeed another sexual act, but this time a positive one, intimating "that the perfectibility of humanity includes sexual relations."[92] Ingvild Gilhus proposes that the birth of Seth was the result of a non-passionate sexual act, or one that was not inspired by the counterfeit spirit but by heavenly spiritual images.[93]

The text further speaks of a third sexual act, in which the rulers seduced women through the counterfeit spirit, "by which they would befoul the souls . . . and they married women and begot children out of the darkness, after the image of their spirit. And their hearts became closed and hardened with the hardness of the counterfeit spirit, down to the present time" (30.7–11). From this passage, it would appear that sexuality in the present world is always mixed up with "the spirit of darkness."

In another retelling of Genesis, the *Reality of the Archons*, the rulers rape what they think is Eve, but actually succeed only to "defile foully" her animate body without the spiritual element (89.17–29); from this violent sexual act Cain is born (91.11). In this version, however, this act is not linked with human sexuality in this world. Eve and Adam go on to give birth to Abel and later bear Seth and Norea "through God" (91.30–5). Norea is "the virgin whom the powers did not defile," despite their later attempts to do so. The *Reality of the Archons* thus speaks of three human sexual actions—the rape of Eve by the evil rulers (obviously negative), the unions of Adam and fleshly Eve which produces Abel (not condemned), and of Adam, spiritual Eve, and God, which produces Seth and Norea (obviously positive).[94]

In the version told in *On the Origin of the World*, the Archons attempt to rape Eve with the express intention of defiling her and preventing her ascension to the upper worlds,[95] but succeed only in raping her material shadow. The shadow as well as their own bodies are defiled (117.12–14). Though this action is not clearly tied to subsequent human sexuality, the Rulers are "very glad" to see Adam "and the female creature who was with him erring ignorantly like the beasts" (118.9), presumably in intercourse. In another complex myth included in this text, representing an earlier stage of creation, Eros is created from the blood of the Virgin and "all the gods and angels . . . become enamoured with him." Eros is the origin, or at least the direct parallel, of intercourse upon earth: "Just as Eros appeared out of the midpoint between light and darkness, and in the midst of the angels and people the intercourse of Eros was consummated, so too the first sensual pleasure sprouted upon the earth. The woman followed the earth, and marriage followed the woman, and reproduction followed marriage, and death followed reproduction (109.16–25)."[96]

These retellings of Genesis in Codex II of the Nag Hammadi library represent sexuality as a key factor in the creation of human society. The evil Rulers,

[92] King (2006), 106–7. [93] Gilhus (2005).
[94] See Layton (1976), 60–2; Gilhus (1985), 60–6.
[95] See Tardieu (1974), 129–31; Stroumsa (1984), 42–4. [96] Tardieu (1974), 165–74.

characterized by symbols of materiality and sexual lust, repeatedly use sexuality in their attempts to contravene the plans of the good spiritual beings. In the *Apocryphon of John*, illegitimate sexuality is explicitly said to be the root cause of all sexuality. Other versions do not state this, but still describe the first sexual act not as a legitimate one between a man and his wife (as in the biblical story), but as an illegitimate act of the forcible "defilement" of a virgin. This reflects a general perception of sexuality as being inherently defiled and defiling, and therefore most suitable to demonstrate the evil nature of the Rulers' deeds.[97] As in the Apocryphal Acts, the rejection of sexuality is performed through the transfer of negative value from traditionally illegitimate sexuality to all sexuality. There may, however, be exceptional cases in which even human procreation somehow involves the higher spirits, though it is not clear if this would sanction actual sexual relations performed without lust or with a spiritual intention, or rather relegate any legitimate sexuality to an unattainable sphere. Furthermore, none of the texts demand sexual abstention in practice, as Saturninus and Marcion were reported to have done.

The *Testimony of Truth*, which attacks rival Christians, is much more practical, and includes the most explicit and developed negative characterization of sexuality in the Nag Hammadi codices, along with significant purity language.[98] One who is under the "defilement of the Law" cannot know the truth, as one cannot serve two masters: the law is defiled because it supports sexual relations, and especially because it leads to procreation and thereby "assists the world." Those who are under the law, "who defile and who are defiled," are inflamed by passion, which is an instrument of the Archon of Darkness to fulfill the law through "those who are begotten in this place" (29.21–30.17). Those with true knowledge will receive eternal life, but as for the ignorant ones, "the defiled pleasures prevail over them" (39.1).

This sexual defilement is explicitly tied to the history of salvation. Those under the Law are controlled by "the errant desire of the angels and the demons and the stars" (29.16). The River Jordan symbolizes sexual desire, and in coming down upon it the Son of Man, who is "alien to defilement," brought the dominion of carnal procreation to an end (30.18–31.3). Jesus was born from a virgin womb (39.30), which remained virginal after his birth (45.18): "let us therefore strengthen [ourselves] as virgins" (40.6–7). The man who "knows the God of truth" is called to "forsake all the things of the world" and "subdue

[97] See Williams (1996), 144. The attitude of these texts can be compared to Justin's *Book of Baruch*, where a model of legitimate marriage and procreation is explicitly upheld, and only adultery and sex between men are repudiated as the result of a primeval fall; see Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.26.9–10 with Williams (1986), 196–227.

[98] See Pearson (1981), 101–20, who identifies the author with Julius Cassian in the late second century. But see the criticism of Gasparro (1984), 154–6 and Mahé and Mahé (1996), 46–9, who find incongruences between Cassian's views and those of the *Testimony of Truth*. See also Mahé (1998).

desire in every way" (41.5–12), presumably relating in this context to sexual continence, among other ascetic customs. Although the fragmentary text does not explain in what way the "error of the angels" created sexuality and how this evil is transferred to the human race,[99] this is clearly connected to the partition of man into flesh, soul, and spirit, and to the alliance between the flesh and concupiscence (30.32) and corruption (42.6).[100] The negative attitude towards the body is expressed also in the explicit opposition to the idea of a carnal resurrection.

### Summary

The texts discussed in this section articulate a comprehensive purity and defilement system regarding sexuality, in which it is perceived as an external aspect of the person. The origin of human sexuality is found in a primeval, sinful moment, as part of the creation of the material world by evil forces. Some of the myths allow for a more complex understanding of human sexuality, with both evil and good models appearing in the primeval context. In two cases (Julius Cassian and the *Testimony of Truth*) various dimensions of sexuality's defilement are detailed: its demonic or evil origins, a condemnation of its actual practice, as well as a perception of the body and the genitals as a secondary creation. Of Marcion's writing we lack even fragments, but it is likely that his conception of sexuality included similar elements. These writers press their logic to the extreme: if sexuality as the most salient expression of corporeality is totally defiling, the only way for humans to be purified is by its total rejection.

## PURITY DISCOURSE IN THE SECOND CENTURY DEBATES ON SEXUAL SIN

### The "household codes"

Household codes, which emphasized the importance of authority, hierarchy, and harmony in the household, are a common feature in Christian literature of the first half of the second century.[101] Scholarship has pointed to the affinity of

[99] Gasparro (1984), 155, believes that 45.23–48 implies that sexuality was created by the demiurge; although a comparison with other texts such as the *Apocryphon of John* makes this probable, the passage itself does not say so.

[100] For the anthropology of this text, see Mahé and Mahé (1996), 36–45.

[101] Col 3:18–4:1; Eph 5:21–6:9; Titus 2:1–10; 1 Tim 2:8–3:12, 5:1–22; 1 Pet 2:18–3:7; Polycarp, *Phil.* 4–6; Ignatius, *Pol.* 4–6.

these codes to Stoic, Peripatetic, or Neopythagorean codes.[102] Many of the household codes include references to sexual issues, and they frequently utilize purity language, but generally and ambiguously.

Ephesians 5 opens on a cultic note, with an exhortation to imitate Christ, who was a fragrant offering; speaking of πορνεία and ἀκαθαρσία is not proper among the saints (ἅγιοι). Correct hierarchical and loving relations between partners in marriage are paralleled to Christ's love for, and purification (καθαρίσας) and sanctification (αὐτὴν ἁγιάσῃ) of the church (5:26–7).[103] The implication is that an ideal wife would be pure, holy, and without blemish, and that these attributes are linked to her submission to her husband. The parallel of church and wife indicates that wives' fidelity to their husbands is essential for securing the community's borders, and that the pure wives of the believers are opposed to the defiled women of the outside world. In other words, sexual impurity includes not only πορνεία but also rebellion against the husband's authority.[104]

The First Epistle to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus attest to a conflict over the Pauline heritage between the author's position, affirming marriage but hedging it with prescriptions, and a position prohibiting marriage, attacked in these epistles but never clearly identified with any specific group.[105] Correct understanding of purity is at the center of these debates. The Epistle to Titus attacks its alleged opponents, especially among "the circumcision party," saying "To the pure all things are pure (πάντα καθαρὰ τοῖς καθαροῖς) but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure (1:15)." This appears to be a counter-attack against the opponents' claims that they are purer because of their adherence to purity rules, rules which the author calls "Jewish myths." The epistle then provides its alternative version of correct conduct: control over the emotions and strict maintenance of traditional social hierarchies, including marriage. 1 Timothy 4:1–5 likewise attacks its opponents, claiming that they focus excessively on impurity of material things, for forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from foods (see above, p. 79). The principle which should govern both sex and eating, according to 1 Timothy, is of essential goodness of the material world as God's creation, and even a potential for holiness through prayer. The parallel of marriage and food implies that as in the new covenant all foods are permitted and none is impure, so also marriage cannot be essentially defiled or defiling.

First Timothy and Titus claim that the ascetic regimen of their opponents (real or imagined) entails a lack of self-control and leads to social strife and

[102] See Balch (1988).

[103] The parallel is far from simple, as the husband's love for his wife does not clearly include purification and sanctification, upon which such emphasis is placed here; compare Ez 16:1–14.

[104] MacDonald (1988), 115–20.

[105] Pagels (1983); Collins (2011), 155–175, identifies this position as that of Marcion; MacDonald (1983) as that of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. However, Hunter (2007) cautions that there is no way to identify the opponents beyond their general ascetic attributes.

disobedience. Their alternative model, focused upon social control and hierarchy, claims for itself true fulfillment of the ideal of σωφροσύνη (moderation or self-control) and ἐγκράτεια (self-control or self-discipline).[106] Σωφροσύνη is one of the cardinal virtues among Hellenistic and early Roman philosophers and moralists, for whom it embodies an ideal of moderation, self-restraint, and decorum in the conduct of the Greek or Roman higher classes; restrained sexuality is but one dimension of σωφροσύνη, though an important one, especially for women.[107] Thus Titus requires an elder to be σώφρονα and ἐγκρατῆ (1:7–9); young women should be σώφρονας and ἁγνάς, busy at home and subject to their husbands (2:4–5); young men are also σωφρονεῖν (2:6), while slaves should be subject to their masters (2:9). All should reject worldly passions, and live in self-control and uprightness (σωφρόνως καὶ δικαίως) (2:12). For 1 Timothy, women must be modest, σωφροσύνης (2:9), and submissive to their husbands. Overseers and deacons, among other virtues, should have a "pure conscience (καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει)" (3:9). Σωφροσύνη/ἐγκράτεια is associated here with terms such as καθαρότης, ἁγνεία and ἁγίοις, and thus to the Pauline construct of the pure believer opposed to the impure idolater (an opposition referred to explicitly in Titus 3:3). This allows the author to support a morality upholding marriage and hierarchy, but at the same time to utilize the rhetorical power of purity discourse and not to abandon it to his more radical opponents.[108] As in Ephesians and as opposed to 1 Corinthians, the purity of the individual body is not emphasized, nor is the body seen as a possible agent for transmission of defilement. In these texts, sexual purity has few cultic or ritual overtones and does not imply a model of contagion; terms of purity can be readily translated as "chaste."

Peter's First Epistle, Ignatius' *Epistle to Polycarp*, Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians* and *1 Clement*, written in the first half of the second century, all include household codes that use purity language to refer to sexual issues.[109] The *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* features exhortations addressed to various groups in the church (ch. 4–5). Wives are enjoined to purity/chastity (ἁγνεία and ἐγκράτεια); widows, who are compared to altars and reminded

[106] See Knust (2006), 94–7; Streete (1999), 299–316, describes this as a conflict over "true" asceticism, "integrative" as opposed to "combative." The connection between σωφροσύνη and ἐγκράτεια is a commonplace, as in Plato, *Resp.* 430e; *4 Macc.* 1.31.

[107] North (1966); for the Pauline and deutero-Pauline use of the term see pp. 312–19, and Towner (2006), 206–9.

[108] For a similar though later battle waged between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis and between Babylonian rabbis and Syriac Christians over the meaning of sexual purity as denoting pure marriage or celibacy, see Boyarin (1993), 138–42.

[109] 1 Peter (3:1–4) exhorts his readers to an exemplary life which will bring glory to God's name, to abstinence from sinful desires, and to total submission to authority. This theme is especially developed regarding women, whose "purity (ἁγνὴν) and reverence" will win over their husbands to the faith, and who are told to adorn their inner self rather than their outward appearance. The meaning of purity here is not clarified, but it appears to be connected to a submission to hierarchy and uniformity of inner and outer aspects.

that sacrifices must be inspected to ensure they are free of blemishes (an allusion to purity),[110] must be σωφρονούσας. The advice to young men and women concerning sexual matters is replete with purity language:

> so let the young men be blameless (ἄμεμπτοι) in all things, concerned above all else for their purity (ἁγνείας)… For it is good to be cut off from the passions of the world, since every passion wages war against the spirit… Therefore we must abstain from all these things, and be subject to the presbyters and deacons… And the virgins must walk in a blameless (ἀμώμῳ) and pure (ἁγνῇ) conscience.[111]

As in the Pauline and the Pastoral Epistles, purity language is not directed against sexual activity as such, but against "lust" and illicit sexual activity. "Purity" or "purity of conscience" are catch-all terms for refraining from illicit sexual activity, in the case of unmarried women ("virgins") presumably encompassing all sexual activity. The call to sexual purity is accompanied by a call to obedience, reiterated in the Epistle several times. Again, issues of authority, hierarchy, and sexuality are brought together through the use of purity language, with the purity of the members of the community representing the purity of the community in the face of the pagan world.[112]

The household code appearing in Ignatius' *Epistle to Polycarp,* though starting with a reference to Ephesians 5, uses ἁγνεία in a different way than we have seen until now:

> If anyone is able to honour the flesh of the Lord by maintaining a state of ἁγνεία, let him do so without boasting. If he boasts, he has been destroyed, and if it becomes known to anyone beyond the bishop, he is ruined (ἔφθαρται). But it is right for men and women who marry to make their union with the consent of the bishop, that their marriage may be for the Lord and not for passion.[113]

Despite the support of marriage, it is not married women who are enjoined to purity or compared to the pure church; rather, ἁγνεία appears as a code-word for abstinence from sexual activity and presumably from marriage, conveying a special status that bishops must have perceived as a threat. Purity within the sexual realm is ascribed by Ignatius to the continent, and less so to harmonious and hierarchical couples; this use of ἁγνεία is reminiscent of the opponents of 1 Timothy and Titus. The integration of the continent into a household code

[110] For this image, of which this is the earliest instance, see Osiek (1983), who finds its origin in the provision of gifts to widows from the community, compared to sacrifices.

[111] Polycarp, *Phil.* 5.3; trans. Ehrman, II.341.

[112] For the *Epistle of Polycarp* as strengthening group borders through purity language, especially as concerns avarice, see Maier (1993). *Contra* Gibson (2003), 157 n. 30, there is no reason to see these mentions of ἁγνεία as evidence that "Polycarp endorsed observance of Jewish purity laws"; they fit within the early second-century household code use of the term, which is clearly based on Pauline usage.

[113] Ignatius, *Pol.* 5.2; trans. Ehrman, II.315.

(slaves and widows are mentioned earlier) may indicate that such people were already seen as an integral, if unusual, part of the community.[114]

In *1 Clement* we find two different uses of ἁγνεία. Clement writes to the Corinthians, "You directed women to accomplish all things with a blameless (ἀμώμῳ), respectful, and pure (ἁγνῇ) conscience, dutifully loving their husbands."[115] Elsewhere, again in a context of communal hierarchy, women are ordered to "display a character of ἁγνεία, worthy of love; let them exhibit the innocent will of their meekness."[116] Considering the meaning of ἁγνεία in the other household codes, restrained sexuality is probably implied here as well. However, *1 Clement* also uses ἁγνεία along the lines of Ignatius to mean total continence: "Let the one who is ἁγνός in the flesh not act arrogantly, knowing that another has provided him with his self-restraint (ἐγκράτεια)."[117] Thus in the same text, sexual ἁγνεία has two different connotations.

Ignatius and *1 Clement* support both kinds of ἁγνεία, as long as they do not undermine the authority figures of the church, and do not show a clear preference between them; presumably, proponents of both were significant members in their communities. A lexical analysis demonstrates the overlap as well as the divergence between the two currents: while ἁγνός and ἐγκρατής are terms that designate both the totally continent and the honorably married, only together with the former is "flesh" mentioned, while σωφροσύνη is used more together with the latter.

To summarize this section, these authors use sexual purity language in two different ways: the majority usage is to designate monogamous, honorable and hierarchical marriage, while the minority usage is to designate those who have no sexual relations at all. Though sexual relations proper are not described as defiling, this is implied in the latter usage. The body is rarely alluded to; the main metaphor in these texts for maintaining the borders of the community is the pure family rather than the pure individual. Thus for the dominant view reflected in these texts, purity language does not appear to reflect a clear purity system which includes some specific defilement, not for sexual sin and certainly not for sexuality itself. For the putative opponents of 1 Timothy and Titus as well as "the pure in flesh" of *1 Clement* and Ignatius purity may have had a more precise meaning. However, here too purity is identified more as a state of not participating in sexual activity, rather than the absence of a specific defilement.

[114] Cf. Rev 14:4, where redemption is promised to the virgins (male!) who have not defiled themselves (ἐμολύνθησαν) with women; see Olson (1997) for a background to this verse in Enochic literature. It is possible that ἁγνεία is deliberately opposed to ἔφθαρται in the case of boasting, as the verb φθείρω may be used for the seduction of a virgin. Thus the opposite of purity is not quite pollution but rather corruption and destruction. The pair ἁγνεία–φθορά is significant in later second-century writings.

[115] *1 Clem.* 1.3; trans. Ehrman, 37.

[116] *1 Clem.* 21.7; trans. Ehrman, 77.

[117] *1 Clem.* 38.2; trans. Ehrman, 103.

## Clement of Alexandria and the "Encratites"

Clement of Alexandria wrote extensively on marriage and sexuality in the second book of his *Paedagogus* and in the third of his *Stromateis*.[118] Clement's basic position, following the Late Stoa and Philo, is procreationist: sex is permitted and even required within marriage for the production of children. Sexual relations for any other objective, even in marriage, are illegitimate and dangerous, lead to sin, and prevent Christians from approaching God. Clement's writings focused on two major issues: first, refuting more radical, "encratite" positions, which rejected marriage altogether, as well as "libertarian" positions which allowed sex outside marriage or for pleasure; second, setting rules for the correct comportment and behavior of Christians in their married life, in which sex receives a limited and well-defined role. For Clement, the curtailment and eventual elimination of desire (ἐπιθυμία) in sexual relations is a decisive part of the refinement and care of the self which leads the Christian Gnostic to ἀπάθεια (equanimity) and salvation.[119]

Although this process of self-refinement could be seen as an extended act of purification, purity terms are infrequent in Clement's writings on sexuality. His focus is on terms borrowed from Stoic and Aristotelian moral philosophy (also central, as we saw, in the household codes), ἐγκράτεια and σωφροσύνη, which express the self-control and moderation required in all walks of life.[120] The objective of ἐγκράτεια is not to arrest a specific impurity arising from an external sexual source, but rather to arrest desires and passions coming from within the person. Even when Clement does use purity as a close synonym of ἐγκράτεια, it is directed against desires and not against the physical sexual act. For example, "We must purify (καθαρευτέον) ourselves from indulgence and lust and take care for our soul… For when it is pure (καθαρός) and set free from all evil the mind is somehow capable of receiving the power of God and the divine image is set up in it."[121]

Clement's reluctance to tie impurity to physical aspects of sexuality is understandable in light of his anti-"encratite" position: his objective is to show that there is nothing inherently impure about sexuality or the body, the only problem is the passions and desires, their excessive expressions and dominance over the faculties of reason. Moreover, sex is nowhere said to be an obstacle for religious activity; tellingly, Clement says that sex should take place at night, and not "after they have come from church, or even from the market, when they should be praying or reading or performing the good works that are best done

[118] For Clement on sexuality, see Oulton and Chadwick (1954), 15–38; Broudéhoux (1970); Brown (1988), 122–39; Maier (1995); Behr (2000), 152–84; Gaca (2003), 247–72; Hägg (2006); Hunter (2007), 105–13.

[119] See especially Hunter (2007), 105–13 and Maier (1995).

[120] For purity language in stoicism, see above, p. 33 n. 87.

[121] *Strom*. 3.42. cf. 3.59, 3.106

by day."[122] Church or prayer are not differentiated from the market and other daily actions. Sexuality is certainly circumscribed and regulated, but it is not an impurity system that regulates it.[123] Clement himself does describe grave sexual sins as impure; thus the opinions and acts of certain "libertines" are polluted,[124] and scripture "regards as defilement an association which is bound up with a strange body and not with that which is bestowed in marriage."[125] However, these usages of impurity are not systematical enough to be more than passing rhetoric.

It is rather to his opponents that Clement attributes conceptions of sexuality as impurity, accusing them of taking all birth, material bodies, and sexual relations to be impure.[126] One of Clement's main opponents is Tatian, who is quoted in the following exegesis of Paul's position on sexual relations in marriage:

> While agreement to be continent makes prayer possible, intercourse of corruption (φθορᾶς) destroys it. By the very disparaging way in which he allows it, he forbids it. For although he allowed them to come together again because of Satan and the temptation to incontinence, he indicated that the man who takes advantage of this permission will be serving two masters, God if there is "agreement," but, if there is no such agreement, incontinence, fornication, and the devil.[127]

In this fragment, Tatian radically totalizes Paul's stance. There is no option for a temporary separation of holy and impure; prayer cannot be set aside as a special holy time, to leave the rest of a person's married life for secular pursuits. A Christian is intrinsically holy, a shrine in which God dwells,[128] from which the corruption of sexual relations should be totally divorced. The innovation here is not only in the intensity of impurity ascribed to sexuality, but in the

[122] *Paed*. 2.10.96 (Marcovich 127, trans. Wood 174).

[123] See, however, *Strom.* 6.100, where it is said that the wife of the Gnostic, after they had already had children, is for him "as a sister," presumably meaning that the ideal couple should be continent after fulfilling their procreative obligations. The *Sentences of Sextus*, a second-century Christian compilation of gnomic sayings based on a previous pagan collection, includes a number of sentences on sexuality, in which purity language is used in a similar way to Clement (Chadwick [1959], 99–101, 172–3). *Sextus* permits marriage, but believes that it should be a "struggle for self-control (ἐγκράτειαν)" (239; cf. 230–40, 274a). He who lacks control of his "stomach and lower organs" is unfaithful and defiles (μιαίνει) God (428–9). Despite general support of marriage, its renunciation is permitted in order to "live as a companion of God" (230a). The body, "the garment of the soul given by God," must be kept spotless (ἄσπιλον) (449). Eating and sexual activity are essentially two sides of the same coin: "as you control your stomach, so you will control your sexual desires" (240).

[124] *Strom*. 3.27–30, 3.109.

[125] *Strom*. 3.89; trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 82. cf. 2.145.

[126] *Strom*. 3.25, 3.46, 3.86, 3.100.

[127] *Strom*. 3.81; trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 77.

[128] *Orat.* 13, 15–16; see Brown (1988), 91–2. It is true, as Koltun-Fromm (2008), 4–6 points out, that this anthropological conception is not linked in the *Oratio* with any ascetic practice, for which we must look to Clement's citation. The argument for such a link is based on the similar connection made in other texts (*2 Clem.* [above, n. 26], *Acts of Thomas*, Aphrahat, *Shepherd of Hermas*) between indwelling of the holy spirit, the person as a temple, baptism, and ascetic practice.

relevance of marital sexuality to the understanding of the person as a permanent temple which strives for contact with God's spirit, as opposed to a neutral agent who engages in holy activity from time to time.[129]

Besides this fragment, there is little to go on to reconstruct the opinions of Tatian and other anti-marriage advocates. Tatian's views on sexuality are known only from the reports of his opponents, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Hippolytus, who tend to lump their opponents together.[130] Irenaeus, the earliest witness, says that "the so called Encratites (Ἐγκρατεῖς)… preached celibacy (ἀγαμίαν) and so…reprove him who made male and female for generating the human race…A certain Tatian was the first to introduce this blasphemy…Like Marcion and Saturninus, he declared that marriage was corruption and fornication (φθορὰν καὶ πορνείαν)."[131] Thus, according to Irenaeus, these figures equated marriage with πορνεία, collapsing the two axes we discussed earlier to one axis of virginity versus πορνεία/corruption; but no further development of purity imagery is evident.[132]

As part of his procreationist agenda, Clement interprets several sexual purity laws of the Hebrew Bible, or attributed to it: the prohibition of sex during women's "purification" (καθάρσεσιν; i.e., menstruation) and during pregnancy,[133] washing after sex,[134] abstinence from sex before divine revelation and (less directly) eating the hare and the hyena, which later interpreters believed were sexually impure.[135] Sex during menstruation is prohibited, Clement explains, because it does not produce children. However, it is not only that the seed is wasted: "it is wrong to contaminate (μολύνειν) fertile seed, destined to become a human being, with excrement (ἀποκαθάρματι) of the body, or to allow it be diverted from the furrow of the womb and swept away in a fetid (ῥυπαρῷ) flow of matter and excrement (ἀποκαθάρματι)."[136]

The principle of ritual impurity is retained with much of its force—it is not allegorized—but its circumstances change radically.[137] The impurity of menstrual blood is not an obstacle to religious activities; rather, the seed is seen as quasi-holy, due to the commandment on procreation and its creative

[129] Quispel (2008), 193, argues that for Tatian baptism uniquely purifies the defilement of prior sexual relations, after which sexual relations are non-purifiable and therefore prohibited. However, the passage from which he adduces this (Clement, *Strom.* 3.82.6) nowhere betrays that he is disputing Tatian on the issue of baptism.

[130] For analyses of Tatian's views on sexuality see Brown (1988), 83–96; Gasparro (1984), 23–78; Pagels (1983), 151–7; Gaca (2003), 221–45. I agree with Hunt (2003), 145–75 that apart from this lone fragment, there is little evidence for Tatian's negative views on sexuality; see further the persuasive deconstruction of Tatian's ascetic image by Koltun-Fromm (2008).

[131] Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.28.1; trans. Unger, I.93.

[132] The same picture is presented by Hippolytus, *Haer.* 8.13, 10.19.

[133] *Strom.* 2.135; 3.72–73; *Paed.* 2.92.

[134] *Strom.* 3.82–3.

[135] *Paed.* 2.83, 2.88.

[136] *Paed.* 2.10.92 (Marcovich 124, trans. Wood 170).

[137] Buell (1999), 46, comments that while much of the procreationist imagery and ideology of Clement comes from Philo and Plutarch, they do not mention the *impurity* of menstruation at all in this context.

potential.[138] For Clement, menstruation is impure, not because of its connection to the sexual act, but rather because of its negation of the true objective of sex.[139] The prohibition on sex during pregnancy (deduced by Clement though not appearing in the Bible) is also explained as a procreationist strategy; however, no impurity is mentioned. The call for three days of abstinence from sex before the Sinai revelation is interpreted as an "attempt to bring the Jews to continence (ἐγκράτειαν) by degrees."[140] Clement thus does not turn to the obvious interpretation, that this sexual abstinence is a preparation for approaching the holy sphere, since this would support the perception of sex as impure; rather, it is part of a general educational message about the value of reducing sexual activity. Concerning washing after sex, Clement says that it is no longer required, "since by one baptism he has washed them clean for every such occasion," but also because "human birth is not a defilement," as "it is not frequent intercourse of the parents which produces birth, but the reception of the seed in the womb."[141] In other words, what is defiled is not sex and birth, but rather frequent intercourse and desire—and the latter, at least, has been "washed clean" by baptism. Lastly, the prohibition on eating the hare and the hyena (the latter is not biblical) is ascribed to their sexual habits, an interpretation already found in earlier authors; the prohibition is not in fact on eating, but is rather a "counsel to restrain violent sexual impulses, and intercourse in too frequent succession."[142] Here certain sexual practices are associated with impurity, as these animals are said to be impure; but it is clear that "impure" means to Clement nothing more than "strongly condemned."

## Pure Christians, defiled pagans: second-century apologists

Most second-century apologists made some reference to the sexual purity of some Christians as proof for the superiority of Christianity over pagan culture and religion.[143]

The *Apology of Aristides* claims that Christian wives are "pure as virgins (ܟܕܬܘܠܬܐ ܕܒܪ ܥܕܝ), and their daughters are modest; and their men keep

[138] For the seed as bearing the *pneuma* of the future person and being accompanied by an angel into the womb, see *Ecl.* 50 and *Strom.* 6.134–6. For Clement's biological and anthropological models of gestation, see Buell (1999), 21–31. Marriage itself is also called "a sacred image which must be kept pure from those things which defile it" (*Strom.* 2.23.145), and "even the seed of the sanctified is holy" (*Strom.* 3.46).

[139] Compare Porphyry, *Abst.* 4.20. Broudéhoux (1970), 134, writes "Nul doute que l'union conjugale pratiquée dans ces conditions ne constitue, aux yeux de Clément, un péché." I see no basis in the text for such a statement.

[140] *Strom.* 3.73; trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 73.

[141] *Strom.* 3.82–3; trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 79. And see *Paed.* 3.46 (Marcovich 175): women should bathe for "cleanliness (καθαριότητος) and health," but men for health only.

[142] *Paed.* 2.10.83 (Marcovich 120, trans. Wood 168), 2.88.

[143] On the apologists' views of marriage and sexuality, see Hunter (2007), 97–9.

themselves from every unlawful union and from all impurity (ܡܢ ܟܠ ܙܘܓܐ ܣܪܝܩܐ ܘܡܢ ܟܠ ܛܘܡܐ)."[144] This is compared to the pagans, who practice same-sex relations and incest but nevertheless accuse the Christians of these same "monstrous abominations (ܥܒܕܝܢ ܕܡܬܩܪܝ ܠܗܘܢ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܪܓܣ)."[145] In the second part of the sentence impurity functions as a synonym for illicit sexual relations. The first part regarding wives, however, is unclear: how can a married woman be pure *as* a virgin? Aristides probably did not intend to say that married Christian women are totally continent;[146] rather, the author is exaggerating his praise for the Christians. The *Apology*'s purity discourse reflects a fundamental ambiguity. On the one hand, the axis of purity and defilement is mapped onto the axis of the degree of *legality* of sexual activity, and therefore marriage is not considered to be defiled, since it is allowed; the men are pure because they abstain from "illegal" sexuality. At the same time, purity and defilement are also mapped onto the axis of the *degree* of sexual activity, without considering its legality; therefore, virginity is considered "pure."

In his *First Apology* (15), Justin Martyr speaks of the unique temperance (σωφροσύνης) of the Christian teaching, which repudiates second marriages and conceives even unrealized desire for a married woman to be sinful. In this passage Justin does not use purity vocabulary,[147] and prefers to remain with σωφροσύνης, a virtue well-known in Roman discussions of sexuality. He does boast, however, that "there are many men and women of sixty and seventy who from childhood were disciples of Christ and remain uncorrupted (ἄφθοροι)." This term, common in medical texts, is rarely found in Christian or moral literature of Justin's time, a choice which can be attributed to the intended audience of the text.[148] Thus though Justin is a witness to practices of lifelong celibacy in the Christian communities of his time, he abstains from utilizing purity language or similes.

The *Embassy* of Athenagoras, from the 170s, points out that Christians abstain even from lustful looks and therefore no doubt practice temperance (σωφρονεῖν) (32–3). They marry only once, for procreative purposes; many grow old without having ever married, as this brings them in closer communion with God. More ambiguously, Athenagoras says (32) that regarding those "whom we call brothers and sisters,"

[144] Aristides, *Apology* 15.5 (Pouderon, 238–9; trans. Harris and Harris, 49). This section is extant in an early Greek fragment, *Pap. Lond. Litt. 223 (2486)*, ed. Pouderon, 299; however, the first sentence there is difficult to understand: "αἱ γυναῖκας ἀυτῶν ἁγναί καὶ παρθένοι εἰσιν," the simple translation of which would be "their wives are pure and virgins," but Pouderon translates "leurs épouses et leurs vierges sont pures." The abbreviated Greek version embedded in *Barlaam and Ioasaph* has only (254): "They refrain themselves from all unlawful intercourse and all impurity (ακαθαρσίας)."

[145] Aristides, *Apology* 17.

[146] Compare 1 Cor 7:29: "those who have wives be as though they had none."

[147] For the relative paucity of purity terms in the apologists, see Wartelle (1989).

[148] Exceptions are LXX Esth 2:2; Titus 2:7; Aristides, *Apology* 15.1 (regarding the virgin Mary). The cognate ἀδιάφθορος is, however, very common in first- and second-century authors, including Philo.

> we exercise the greatest care that their bodies should remain undefiled (ἀνύβριστα) and uncorrupted (ἀδιάφθορα); for the Word again says to us, If any one kiss a second time because it has given him pleasure…; therefore the kiss, or rather the salutation, should be given with the greatest care, since, if there be mixed with it the least defilement (παραθολωθείη) of thought, it excludes us from eternal life.

Again the Pauline and pseudo-Pauline ἁγνεία and καθαρός are not used, and terms more in vogue in non-Christian moral literature are preferred. Both the body and the mind may be defiled by a wrongly-intentioned kiss: in the realm of sexual defilement, intention does not remain in the mental sphere, but also creates bodily defilement.[149]

## Summary

The authors discussed in this section agree that marriage is allowed, and for some it is even required for procreation and for a functional, ordered society. Sexual purity is expressed in marriage in which correct dispositions and practices are maintained. Men must be faithful to their wives and wives must submit to their husbands, maintaining the strict boundaries of the conjugal couple and the hierarchy of the family unit. These boundaries extend beyond divorce and even beyond death, so that widows must remain unmarried. Desire is dangerous and sinful primarily because it leads to extramarital sex, and secondarily because it leads to ill-timed, overly-frequent, or unneeded sex in marriage. The purity of person, household, and community are strongly linked to one another through the marital institution. The anthropological significance of sexual purity is developed by Clement, for whom sexual desire is not the result of external forces but of internal "passions," which must be bridled.

However, in some of these texts we found also praise of celibacy, partial or total, and of long-term virginity. These conceptions do not negate marriage but rather function alongside it; both marriage–πορνεία and virginity–sex are set along the purity–impurity axis. Thus in *1 Clement*, Ignatius, and the *Sentences of Sextus* both virginity and honorable marriage are mapped as pure (though sex as of itself is not said to be impure in any of these early texts), without clear distinction. Aristides' *Apology* is an interesting example, as the two types of sexual behavior are juxtaposed despite their inherent incompatibility. A similar move can be seen in Justin, who speaks mostly against the defilement of πορνεία but also mentions the continence of many Christians. The merging of two disparate

[149] For kisses as defiling and defining community borders, see Penn (2005), who discusses Athenagoras on p. 109. The emphasis on Christians' sexually innocent minds is found in Justin as well as in another late second-century apologist, Theophilus, *Autol.* 3.13, who calls this ἁγνεία and σεμνότητος.

sexual systems through the use of the purity–impurity axis serves to enhance the value of virginity, as it is opposed not to a practice of ambivalent moral value (married sex) but rather to a practice on which there is a wide consensus of abhorrence (πορνεία). Typically, when all three axes (sexual legality, sexual activity, and purity) are mentioned, the impurity pole is connected to the "sexual legality" axis (illegal sexual acts are defiled) while the purity pole is connected to the "sexual activity" axis (lack of sexual activity is pure).

In parallel to this tendency to merge sexual sin and sexual activity through purity discourse, we find in other texts the opposite tendency—to differentiate clearly and consciously between sexual sin and sexual activity along the purity axis. Already the Pastoral Epistles show that sexual purity, together with alimentary purity, was an issue of contention between Christian groups. The authors of the texts supporting marriage were clearly aware that their opponents' call for total continence was framed through purity discourse, and attempted to define a different way of practicing sexual purity. Purity discourse itself was therefore not transparent but rather an arena for contention between these second-century groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

As seen throughout this chapter, impurity is one of the main terms associated with sin, especially sexual sin, in Early Christian texts. As regards non-sexual sin, and beyond idolatry which was one of the foci of baptism, the ritual at the border of the community, language of purity and defilement is used especially to describe social sins: deceit, quarrels, and non-submission to authority. The community, reflected and embodied in its common meal and main ritual, the eucharist, is endangered by these sins. In this case, the "community is a body" metaphor at the background of much purity language is evident. The flip side of this metaphor, "the body is the community," is enacted through restrictions and management of sexual activity, certainly the most prevalent and salient use of purity language in early Christian texts. Two types of sexual impurity, corresponding to the types of "battle" and "truce," may be discerned in the texts.

The "battle" type, which was more dominant in early Christian texts, springs from both Jewish and pagan traditions on the impurity of sexual sin. In the first centuries of Christianity there was a shift in the understanding of this impurity. First, it became strongly associated with the body of the performer of the sexual act, and not only with the action itself. Second, impurity was expanded to sexual contact as a whole, even inside "legitimate" marriage: this was a major (though rarely explicit) move towards the de-legitimization of sexuality. For both sexual sin and sexuality in general, it is irrelevant to categorize Christian

sexual impurity as "moral" or "ritual" according to the internal/external dimension: it is specifically a person's body (or a certain aspect of it, the flesh), which is involved in sexuality and from which this impurity springs, and yet, the heart and mind are clearly implicated in it as well. Therefore, the move made by many Christian writers concerning food issues, an isolation of "true" impurity as originating in the interior faculties rather than the exterior of the person, is rarely attempted here. Rather, sexual impurity is linked to body and soul at once; purity of both soul and body, claimed Christian authors, was a hallmark of Christians as opposed to pagans. While in food issues Jewish purity was the foil to Christian custom, here it is pagan impurity which is opposed to Christian purity, a theme upon which most of the second-century apologists elaborate. The intention behind the sexual act is a significant cause of defilement, but it is only part of the picture: a virgin is "pure" and a non-virgin "corrupted," whatever the reason. Impurity as an alternative or complementary dimension to that of sin allows writers to go beyond portraying sex simply as permitted or prohibited.

In some texts, sexual impurity is said to arise from a specific, external source to the person, described in different ways: it enters a person through the agency of certain spirits and/or with the aid of his own volition (*Shepherd of Hermas*), or was created by an evil divinity (Marcion, Cassian, many Nag Hammadi texts). In other texts, this impurity is found within the person, who is described as bifurcated: it is synonymous with the evil body as opposed to the soul (*Acts of John* and *Acts of Andrew*, Nag Hammadi texts), or the flesh as opposed to the spirit (Paul and many other authors). On the many occasions on which the demonic is implicated in sexual impurity, this is not so much (as in food) to explain the presence of impurity in the material world, but rather to emphasize the evil of sex or sexual sin, and to integrate this evil into cosmology and sacred history, according to a model already found in *Jubilees* and the Enoch literature. In any case, sexual impurity is a permanent obstacle before the close association with God that humans are called to achieve.

# Part IV

# New Configurations: Purity, Body, and Community in the Third Century

# 8

# Dietary and Sexual Purity in Jewish-Christian Communities

A number of texts of the third century widen the view to Jewish-Christian communities, which continued to observe some of the purity laws of the Hebrew Bible as well as later purity traditions originating from the Second Temple period. These texts are the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the third-century source contained in the *Pseudo-Clementines*, and sources on the Elchasites.

"Jewish-Christian" is a modern not an ancient term, and its most useful definition has been much discussed.[1] A recent assessment concludes that if the term is to be retained for its usefulness it is better to speak of "indicators" of Jewish Christianity rather than of definitions. The primary among these indicators are ritual practices (circumcision, Shabbat, purity), "characteristically Jewish ideas," an ethnic link to the Jewish people, and a low Christology.[2] In any case, by discussing these texts separately I am not arguing that the purity discourse and practices of Jewish-Christian communities were totally unique, or that there existed a singular "Jewish Christianity," but rather that the purity discourses on baptism and sexuality contained in these texts are unusual enough to justify discussing them under a separate heading. In this chapter and the next I will discuss together a number of purity discourses (food, baptism, sin, sexuality) rather than separate them as up to now. This structure will help to draw connections between the various purity domains of these writings.

## PSEUDO-CLEMENTINE *HOMILIES* AND *RECOGNITIONS*

The Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* recount the miracles, conversions, and speeches of the apostle Peter, as told by Clement, future bishop of Rome. Although these texts were composed at a late date—the *Homilies*, extant

[1] See Taylor (1990); Reed (2003); Marcus (2006).

[2] Luomanen (2011), 8–13.

in the original Greek, in the fourth century, and the *Recognitions*, extant only in Latin and Syriac translations from the fifth—it is generally recognized that they are both based on a common, shorter text, written in Syria in the middle of the third century.[3] This common text contained, embedded in a narrative proving that a person can overcome Fate (and astrology) through a decision to be baptized, evidence for beliefs and practices thought to originate from a Jewish-Christian milieu.

## Dietary laws

The *Pseudo-Clementines*' milieu is reflected in a number of distinctive food observances which were certainly not the norm in most Christian communities of this period, such as the recurring commandment to refrain from eating together with the unbaptized.[4] This demand is tied to the gentiles' impure life (ἀκαθάρτως αὐτοὺς βιοῦν),[5] or, more specifically, to the impure spirits possessing whoever worshiped an idol/demon in the past.[6]

The *Pseudo-Clementines* condemn blood sacrifice as a demonic invention and practice, allowed to the Israelites only grudgingly and for a time.[7] Following *Jubilees* (above, p. 49), blood is singled out as a highly polluting substance, consumed in demonic worship; its use in ritual purification is therefore illogical, and should be replaced with purification by water. The prohibition of eating blood, meat containing blood, or food sacrificed to idols is reiterated in various formulations.[8] The prohibited substances are said to be "polluting to both body and soul (*animam simul et corpus polluunt*)" (*Rec.* 4.36); in the *Homilies*, these prohibitions appear together with other regulations concerning washing after sexual contact and menstruation.[9] The link between blood, sacrifices, and

[3] For an overview, see Jones (2005). There have been many attempts to reconstruct the various sources, a discussion which cannot be followed up here. In general, passages which appear in both the *Homilies* and the *Recognitions* are assumed to originate from the third-century source; these, in turn, may have originated from earlier sources. For a history of the scholarship, see Jones (1993).

[4] *Rec.* 1.19.5 = *Hom.* 1.22.5; *Rec.* 7.29.3–5 = *Hom.* 13.4.3–5; *Rec.* 7.36.4 = *Hom.* 13.11.4; *Rec.* 2.71; see Molland (1955), 21–4.

[5] *Hom*. 13.4 (Rehm I.194). [6] *Rec.* 2.71.

[7] See *Hom* 8.13–20, 9.14; *Rec.* 1.29, 36–7, 39, 48, 64, 2.71, 4.29, 5.32 with Boustan and Reed (2008a), 336–52; for a comparison with other Jewish-Christian traditions, see Jones (1995), 147–9, to which add *Gospel of Judas* 38–9. The rejection of animal sacrifice is a common trope among late antique Christians and philosophers; see Ullucci (2012) and above, pp. 34–5.

[8] For analyses of these prohibitions in the *Ps.-Clementines*, see Klijn (1968); Wehnert (1997), 145–86; for a short overview, Jones (2005), 321–2.

[9] In other passages (*Hom*. 8.23; 9.23), the prohibition on eating from the table of demons/idols is mentioned independently, without the prohibition on blood. Klijn (1968) discerns two layers in these texts, the earlier speaking of demons and blood, and the later, influenced by the Apostles' Decree, including also carrion. Even if this reconstruction is true, the earlier text still includes the connection between impure demons and the pollution of blood.

demons is developed further in a number of passages of the *Pseudo-Clementines*. The demons are told that they do not have power over men, except if the men subjugate themselves to them by

> worshipping you, and sacrificing and pouring libations, and partaking of your table … or shedding blood, or tasting dead flesh (σαρκῶν νεκρῶν γευόμενος), or filling themselves with that which is torn of beasts, or that which is cut, or that which is strangled, or anything else that is impure (ἀκαθάρτου).[10]

Demons enter people by tricking them into sacrificing and then eating the sacrifice; they do this in order to gain a body, which allows them to take part in corporeal sins, among them gluttonous eating. The residing demons, who mix up with the human soul, cause diseases of various kinds. Fasting and asceticism are therefore very useful in getting rid of them, though baptism is the only final remedy.[11]

It is evident that the *Pseudo-Clementines* are much more receptive to the idea that demons physically pollute the eater of blood or sacrifices than Clement of Alexandria (above, pp. 74–6). Although sin is created by the person's free will, the resulting pollution is not rooted in human choice to detest the sacrifice but rather in direct action by the demons themselves. There is no polemic with "Jews" over the nature of defilement in the background of these texts, and their anthropology is not as bifurcated between body and soul. Therefore, for these writers, demons serve less to bridge spirit and matter, as in Clement of Alexandria, and more to underline the intensity, danger, and dynamism of idol food defilement, and to link it to a broader history of the battle of good with evil.

There is no trace in the *Pseudo-Clementines* of adherence to the Jewish dietary laws as regards impure animals, but also no proof that such laws were not adhered to. This runs contrary to the common opinion that the *Pseudo-Clementines* originated in an Ebionite milieu, as there is evidence that the Ebionites did adhere to the dietary laws.[12] However, if the *Pseudo-Clementines* were written in a vegetarian community, adherence to most of the dietary laws would not have required special regulations.[13]

[10] *Hom.* 8.19; trans. *ANF* VIII.274.

[11] This complex demonology appears both in *Hom.* 9.9–15 and in *Rec.* 4.16–19, and is therefore probably early. However, while in the *Homilies* the demons enter the body by themselves through the physical eating of the sacrificed food, in the *Recognitions* the process is controlled, to a degree, by individual choice: eating and drinking immoderately and with desire is an "invitation" to the demons to enter the person. The *Rec.* refer more generally to immoderate consumption, and only occasionally (4.19) to sacrifice. See Snowden (1990), 81–8.

[12] Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 11.12. The identification of the *Ps.-Clementines* with the Ebionites owes much to Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.15–16; for criticism of this identification, see Finley (2009), 283–93. In the *Didascalia Apostolorum* 23–4, an unidentified group is attacked for observing the Levitical dietary rules, specifically not eating pigs, together with other Jewish observances. For analysis of this text, see Zellentin (2013).

[13] See Jones (2005), 322.

## Baptism and sexual purity

The *Pseudo-Clementines* speak of three kinds of ritual washings in water:[14]

1. Voluntary washings performed by individuals before eating and prayer, as well as in the morning or the evening without specific reason.[15]
2. Washings compulsory for the whole community, after sexual relations and after menstruation.[16]
3. One-time initiatory baptism.[17]

The presence of three different types of washing in one text is unique in contemporary Christian writings, probably reflecting the uniqueness of the community from which it originated in maintaining purity customs prevalent in contemporary Judaism, together with the adoption of new rituals such as baptism and eucharist. The three types of washing appear in different contexts and are seldom linked to each other. Furthermore, the vocabulary shows that voluntary washings were seen as distinct from initiatory baptism, though their relationship to washings for sexual purity is unclear.[18]

The multiplicity of washings corresponds to the complexity of the *Pseudo-Clementines*' sexual ethic. At first sight, the third-century source common to the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* and *Homilies* appears to hold to a similar ethic as that of the second-century Household Codes. Marriage is strongly supported, while virginity is nowhere mentioned. Both in the narrative and in the exhortations embedded in it, *σωφροσύνη* is emphasized as the prime sexual value, opposed to sins such as adultery, *πορνεία*, and incest, sometimes described by impurity terms.[19] However, there are some unusual traits. On the one hand, the support of marriage extends even to desire (*ἐπιθυμία*), which is necessary as it leads to reproduction; desire is evil only in adultery.[20] On the other hand, there is also a condemnation of desire (*ἐπιθυμία/concupiscentia*) as characterizing the "first birth" of "fire," which is purified and replaced in baptism by a second birth, "of water."[21] Sexual desire caused the fall of the angels, causing them to be "sunk in

[14] The three types of washing are discussed by Gianotto (2008); Wehnert (2010).

[15] Usually using *λυόω*: *Hom.* 8.2 = *Rec.* 4.3; *Hom.* 10.26 = *Rec.* 5.36; *Hom.* 14.1 = *Rec.* 8.1; *Hom.* 9.23, 10.1, 11.1, 14.3.

[16] *Hom.* 7.4, 7.8 (using *λυόω*); *Hom.* 11.28–33 = *Rec.* 6.10–12 (using *βαπτίζω*).

[17] Always with *βαπτίζω*: *Hom.* 6.15 = *Rec.* 11.35; *Hom.* 9.19 = *Rec.* 4.32; *Hom.* 11.26–8 = *Rec.* 6.8–10; *Hom.* 13.4–21 = *Rec.* 7.28–38; *Rec.* 1.39–69, 2.71–72, 9.9–11.

[18] For questions of vocabulary, see Molland (1955), 4–5; Ferguson (2009), 250.

[19] For the opposition *σωφροσύνη*/adultery, and the pollution (*μιαν-*) of the latter, see *Epistle of Clement to James*, 7–8; *Ps.-Clementine Hom.* 9.23, and esp. 13.13–20. *Hom.* 3.26 uses both *σωφροσύνη* and *ἁγνεία*. These are roughly paralleled by *Rec.* 7.15, 7.38, while *Rec.* 6.12 adds that one kind of chastity is "that sexual intercourse must not take place heedlessly and for the sake of mere pleasure, but for the sake of begetting children." On the sexual ethics of the *Homilies* and their relationship to encratism and the ancient novel, see Horn (2007).

[20] *Hom.* 19.18, 21; 20.4.

[21] *Hom.* 11.26; *Rec.*9.7. For *ἐπιθυμία* in the *Ps.-Clementines*, see Cirillo (1988).

defilement (μιασμῷ)…unable to turn back to the first purity (ἀμίαντον) of their proper nature."[22] The imagery is reminiscent of Julius Cassian or some Gnostic sources discussed above, and appears to reflect a perception of sexual desire as evil and incompatible with Christian life.

Voluntary washings were clearly not for the purification of some specific defilement, but rather demonstrated heightened purity and praiseworthy ascetic conduct, similar to that found in Second Temple writings.[23] As opposed to washings for sexual purity and initiatory baptism, which are widely discussed in the texts, voluntary washings are presented incidentally, perhaps indicating an expectation that readers would not see them as controversial.[24] Alternatively, the writer may have attempted to create an impression that such washings were normally practiced in the apostolic period in which the text is set, not requiring comment.

The imperative of washing for sexual purity—after sexual relations and following menstruation—is developed much more, with clear signs of controversy. Unusually for a Christian text, the *Pseudo-Clementines* unequivocally perceived menstruation as defiling, and required purification after intercourse. Although this position is not unique in the third century, the central place it receives here is unparalleled.[25] It is stated in brief in a version of the Apostles' Decree: "And this is the service He has appointed…to wash after intercourse; that the women on their part should keep the law of purification."[26] The most extended discussion follows shortly after a discussion of baptism, though no connection is made between the two rituals.[27] Not approaching a woman while she is menstruating is termed simply "purity."[28] Purity, of both heart and body, is what differentiates human from animal:

[22] *Hom.* 8.13 (the parallel in *Rec.* 1.29 is less interested in defilement and purity).

[23] See above, p. 53; Gianotto (2008), 228.

[24] This is somewhat surprising, as such washings were controversial. See Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.15.3 (Holl I.352–3, trans. Williams I.143): "in the *Travels* they have changed everything…and slandered Peter…saying that he was baptised daily for purification as they are." Epiphanius links the daily washings to sexual purity washings (30.21.1–2 [Holl I.361, trans. Williams I.149]): "the other false accusations which they make…that every day, before so much as eating bread, Peter had had immersions…Since they are defiled themselves and often indulge themselves sexually, they make lavish use of water…under the impression that they have purification through baptisms." This connection, however, is not made in the *Ps.-Clementines*. Compare the contemporary controversies on the custom of daily immersion in rabbinic sources, Kiperwasser (2012).

[25] See Reed (2012); Wehnert (1997), 148–73.

[26] *Hom.* 7.8. The parallel version of the Apostles' Decree in in *Rec.* 4.36 does not include menstrual purity.

[27] *Hom.* 11.28–33 = *Rec.* 6.10–12. Freyne (2010) says that in the *Ps.-Clementines* "Christian baptism and Jewish ritual purity support and complement each other," as opposed to texts such as the *Epistle to the Hebrews* or Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, in which they are seen as contradictory. However, while the *Ps.-Clementines* indeed perceive both baptism and ritual purity as important, they appear to have been conceived as operating on two completely different levels.

[28] See also *Hom.* 7.4 and 7.8, which generally parallel each other, except that in the former the listeners are exhorted "to be washed from all pollution (ἐκ παντὸς ἀπολούεσθαι λύματος)," but in the latter, "to wash (λούεσθαι) after intercourse; that the women…keep the law of menstruation (ἄφεδρον)."

> If purity (τὸ καθαρεύειν) be not added to the service of God, you would roll pleasantly like the dung-beetles. Wherefore as man, having something more than the irrational animals, namely, rationality, purify (καθάρατε) your hearts from evil by heavenly reasoning (λογισμῷ), and wash your bodies in the bath (λουτρῷ δὲ πλύνατε τὸ σῶμα). For purification according to the truth is not that the purity of the body precedes purification after the heart, but that purity follows goodness.[29]

Human rationality is the reason for purification of heart but also for washing the body, opposed to a bestial lack of cleanliness. Purity of the body is secondary to purity of heart, but both are essential for worship; bodily negligence prevents true understanding and enlightenment. Jesus' preference for purity of heart over body was directed only towards "the hypocrites" who cared solely about purification of body, and not to those knowledgeable Pharisees and Scribes who purified both heart and body.[30] The same concern found in other texts concerning the relationship between interior and exterior purification in baptism is found here concerning washing for sexual purity. A further argument for bodily purification is its universality: it is a general religious practice, accepted by most pagans, and truths and good practices should be accepted even if originating in error.[31] Indeed, if idol-worshipers take such pains with purity, how much more should the service of God, in which "it is necessary to attain the one and whole of purity," include bodily purification.[32] The requirement of purification is based on a unified conception of body and soul, but also upon conservatism: it should be performed simply because that is what rational people do, whatever their religion. The author perceives his community as participating in religious practice common to all humanity, linking purity discourse to a discourse of naturalness.

Menstruation is also linked to the demonic: The *Recognitions* explains that demons produce defects in children born from intercourse performed "while lust is wholly gratified and no care is taken in copulation … because they have not observed the law of intercourse." People should therefore "avoid causes of impurity, so that that which is produced may be pure (*inmunditiae causas declinet, ut possit mundum esse quod gignitur*)."[33] That the main "cause of impurity" was menstruation can be seen in the parallel passage in the *Homilies*, in which children's diseases are said to be the result of ill-timed intercourse: "Because

[29] *Hom.* 11.28. [30] *Hom.* 11.29 = *Rec.* 6.11.

[31] For purity as distinguishing humans from animals and therefore as a "natural" human characteristic, see Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.11. In *y. Ber.* 3.4 [26b], a woman who does not purify herself (from menstrual defilement?) is said to be "like a beast."

[32] *Hom.* 11.30–33 = *Rec.* 6.12–14. Compare this respectful attitude towards pagan water purification to that of Justin (above, p. 118), and Tertullian, *Bapt.* 5, who says that it demonstrates the power of water. What Justin and Tertullian see as similar to baptism, the *Ps.-Clementines* compare to purification from sexual defilement. To the reasons appearing in the *Homilies*, *Rec.* 6.12 adds that purification assures that sex is performed not for pleasure but for reproduction.

[33] *Rec.* 9.9.

men, following their own pleasure in all things, cohabit without observing the proper times; and thus the deposition of seed, taking place unseasonably, naturally produces a multitude of evils… for instance, by not knowing when one ought to cohabit with his wife, as if she be pure from her discharge (*καθαρὰ ἐξ ἀφέδρου*)."[34] These diseases, however, are a result of "sins of ignorance," not of wickedness.[35] Intercourse during menstruation is thus seen as a problem with both spiritual and medical aspects.

In an allegorical account in the *Homilies*, Eve is described as an evil prophetess representing the female principle, or flesh and blood as opposed to the spirit. This female principle is said to be "as a female being in her menses (*ἐνμηνίοις*), who at the offering of sacrifices is stained with blood; and then she pollutes (*μολύνει*) those who touch her" (*Hom.* 3.24).[36] The comparison of menstrual to sacrificial blood is doubtless part of the Ps.-Clementine polemic against sacrifice.[37] This myth could be seen as a development of the gnostic myths of the sexual defilement of Eve by the archons (see above, pp. 166–8), but here the defilement is not from sexual intercourse itself but from the menstrual blood, as would be more appropriate for a community supporting marriage.[38]

Demons have a central role in sexual sin. The *Homilies* explain that since demons enter men's bodies in order to attain sexual and alimentary pleasures, they can be expelled by "abstinence, and fasting, and suffering of affliction." If the demon is stubborn recourse must be made to "prayers and petitions, refraining from every occasion of impurity (*ἀκαθάρτου*), that the hand of God may touch him for his cure, as being pure (*ἁγνοῦ*) and faithful."[39] "Refraining from impurity" would probably entail temporary sexual renunciation, but perhaps other abstinences as well.

[34] *Hom.* 19.22; compare *T. Naph.* 8.7–10 with Marcus (2010), 618–23.

[35] See DeConick (2003), 337; Kelley (2007). A rabbinic parallel is *Leviticus Rabba* 15:5, which states that a child born of menstrual intercourse will become leprous. The same theory is cited by Diodorus of Tarsus (Deconinck [1912], fr. 73); Theodoret, *Qu. Lev.* 22; Jerome, *Comm. Ez.* 18.6. Roman medical texts do not mention such a result, and in general describe menstrual blood as harming crops rather than future children or sexual partners; see Richlin (2002), 225–56; Lennon (2010); Marienberg (2003), 113–20.

[36] The account parallels that ascribed to the Quqites by Theodore bar Koni, *Book of the Scholia* 11 (ed. Hespel and Draguet, *Livre des scolies: recension de Séert* [Louvain: Peeters, 1981], 249–50). This parallel supports the claim of Drijvers (1967) that Theodore's description is cited from an ancient source, as well as his identification of a Jewish-Christian context for the sect. For a close Zoroastrian parallel, see *Bundahishn* 3.5.15–16, discussed in Koren (2011), 89–91; and compare *Avot deRabbi Nathan B*, ch. 9: "Adam was the blood of the Holy One, blessed be He; Eve came and spilt it. Consequently, the commandments of menstrual purity were given to her."

[37] See Reed (2012), 16–17.

[38] Compare also the purifying light/blood poured out by Pronoia in the first stages of the cosmogony in *On the Origin of the World* 108 (above, p. 167). There, the blood of Pronoia (also called "virgin") purifies the waters, fertilizes the earth, and causes plants to grow, the opposite of the properties usually ascribed to menstrual blood by Roman writers, according to Richlin (2002). For general parallels between this text and the cosmogony of the Ps.-Clementine *Homilies*, see Tardieu (1974), 92 nn. 44–5; 149–50.

[39] *Hom.* 9.10. See Schoeps (1950).

Both sexual sin and demons are pollutions from which baptism purifies, according to the *Ps.-Clementines*.[40] At the basic level, as in other sources, baptism brings "forgiveness of sins"[41] and "washes away sin."[42] Pre-baptismal sins can be forgiven because they were performed in a state of ignorance; only following baptismal illumination can the sinner become fully responsible (*Hom.* 11.27 = *Rec.* 6.10). The state of ignorance before baptism, though itself sinful, is the reason that the sins committed are not so serious.[43] Baptism replaces the original, corrupt generation of the person through sexual desire (ἐπιθυμία) with an incorrupt regeneration "of water." The water of baptism extinguishes the fire of lust (*Hom.* 11.26). According to Luigi Cirillo, this betrays the influence of the idea, rooted in Second Temple literature and developed in gnostic writings, that ἐπιθυμία is the root of all evil, passed on from generation to generation.[44]

Demons are central in the baptismal theology of the *Ps.-Clementines*. Illness-causing demons enter the body by participation in pagan sacrifices and are maintained in it through sinful eating and sexual pleasure.[45] Baptism purifies and drives out any demons which reside in the "inmost affections of the soul," and also confers the power to exorcise demons from other people's souls. The presence of demons explains the prohibition on eating with the non-baptized: the argument originally used by Paul against eating food offered to idols (1 Cor 1:20) is here transferred from the food to those eating it, and generalized categorically to all the non-baptized. As opposed to the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, it is baptism itself which works against the demons; preparatory rituals for exorcism are not mentioned.[46]

Baptism was ideally preceded by a three-month preparation period, including fasts and prayers (*Hom.* 11.35 = *Rec.* 3.67); a fast of one to several days, however, seen as essential for separation of the baptizand from paganism, is more often described (*Hom.* 3.73, *Hom.* 13.9–11 = *Rec.* 7.34). Baptism is strongly linked to food rituals: table-fellowship, which is the ultimate expression of love (*Ep. of Clement to James*, 9) is conditioned upon baptism, because "the gentiles live impurely,"[47] and the ritual was completed by a partaking of the eucharist.

As opposed to the discussion of washing in water for following menstruation, the discussion of baptism includes no clear reference to the relationship

[40] See Cirillo (1988); Wehnert (1997), 168–73; Ferguson (2009), 250–3.

[41] *Hom.* 7.8, 8.22, 9.23, 11.27, *Rec.* 1.39, 1.69. [42] *Hom.* 6.8, *Hom.* 9.19 = *Rec.* 4.32.

[43] For ignorance prior to baptism, see 1 Tim 1:13; *Kerygma Petri* fr. 8 (= Clement, *Strom.* 6.6.48); Aristides, *Apology* 17.3. And see *Hom.* 10.12–13 = *Rec.* 5.18; Clement of Alexandria cited above, p. 128.

[44] Cirillo (1988); see also Strecker (1981), 197–201.

[45] *Rec.* 4.32, *Hom.* 9.9–19. For the *Ps.-Clementines*' demonology, see Schoeps (1950).

[46] Kelly (1985), 124–8. A passage appearing only in the *Recognitions* (9.10), and therefore probably late, uses imagery which integrates all three baptismal purifications. A sinful person is likened to a wick covered with pitch, on which the fire kindled by demons immediately catches; "but if the wick is not covered in the pitch of sin, but in the water of purification and regeneration, the fire of the demons shall not be able to be kindled in it."

[47] *Hom.* 13.4–11 = *Rec.* 7.29; *Rec.* 2.71–2.

between inner and outer purification.[48] This is probably because purification following menstruation was much more controversial, and commonly seen as bodily purification only. Baptism, however, was primarily seen as a purification of entities residing inside the person, such as sin, demons, and lust, but by implication also of the body inasmuch as it takes part in sinful practices purified through baptism. This inner purification was achieved by the invocation of the divine name over the baptizand as well as by the intense pre-baptismal preparations, repentance, and study.

Another facet of the theory of baptism is explained in *Rec.* 1.39 and 1.49, passages dated to circa 200:[49] Baptism was instituted, according to these passages, as a replacement for the forgiveness of sins that the temple sacrifices afforded.[50] Baptism is again said to extinguish fire, but this time the fire of sacrifices which "the priest kindled for sin" (*Rec.* 1.49). Baptism absolves sin and opens the way for a life of perfection, "being purified not by the blood of beasts, but by the purification of the Wisdom of God." The idea that the purification of baptism replaces purification through sacrifice is relatively rare; most texts of the period speak of the replacement of temple sacrifices by Jesus' death, the eucharist, obedience to God, or other moral values.[51] The writer may have preferred this choice as it accorded with his general baptismal symbolism of water extinguishing fire.

## THE *DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM*

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* is thought to have been written in Greek in the third century, though only fourth-century Latin and Syriac translations remain.[52] The text, which focuses on defining correct practices and rituals in the community, reflects a conflict between different groups over the degree to which Jewish Law should be observed.[53] The author holds that only the Ten Commandments should be observed, while the rest of the Law was in force only temporarily.

[48] One exception is *Hom.* 8.23, which says that the baptized are "pure in body and in soul."

[49] Jones (1995), 163.

[50] According to the Latin translation; the Syriac implies that temple sacrifice did not truly absolve sins but was only thought to do so. See Jones (1995), 69.

[51] Justin, *Dial.* 13, speaks of both baptism and Jesus' death as the replacement of sacrifice, following the link between them made in Rom. 6:2–6. Jesus' death: Heb 9:11–15 (clearly used in this citation); *1 Clement* 36; Justin, *Dial.* 111; Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 6.14. Eucharist: *Didache* 14; Ignatius, *Rom.* 4.2; Justin, *Dial.* 41; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.17–18. Obedience and faith: *Barn.* 2–3. And see Ferguson (1980).

[52] For date, provenance, and textual tradition see Vööbus (1979), I.23–68; Bradshaw (2002), 78–80; Stewart-Sykes, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 49–55, 89–91. Stewart-Sykes, 49–55, argues that chapter 26, containing Jewish-Christian polemic, should be dated later, to the early fourth century; but see the criticism of Marcus (2010), 600 n.14.

[53] Conflicts and identity-formation between the various groups as reflected in the *Didascalia* are discussed by Fonrobert (2001); Marcus (2010); Zellentin (2013).

In addition to rejection of Shabbat and circumcision, the author argues at length against women who practice purification following menstruation, urges his readers to ignore issues of death defilement, and rejects what he sees as excessive dietary restrictions. This text thus provides evidence for conflicting third-century views on purity practices and beliefs, as well as their supporting reasoning.

Like the *Ps.-Clementines*, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* supports marriage unequivocally; it attacks as heresy the claim that "not marrying is holiness (ܩܕܘܫܬܐ)," [54] and uses conventional purity rhetoric to describe adultery or other sexual sins threatening marriage.[55] The *Didascalia* also includes a number of innovative sexual prescriptions, such as exhortations on the importance of separate and modest bathing (3) and of segregation of women and men in the church (12). As opposed to the *Pseudo-Clementines*, however, this position does not translate into an obligation for marital ritual purity regulations. Rather, the *Didascalia* argues vigorously against keeping "the habits of nature and fluxes and intercourse," observances it claims were held by some men and women "who have converted from the Peoples," i.e., Jews. According to the hostile witness of the *Didascalia*'s redactor, these people held to a number of closely connected customs: first, abstinence from prayer, reading Scripture, and participation in the eucharist during the "seven days of menstruation"; second, bathing after the seven days of menstruation (for women), seminal emissions (for men), or intercourse (for both) before "they assemble" (in the Syriac, ܢܬܟܢܫܘܢ) or "pray" (in the Latin, *orent*); third, prohibition of intercourse during menstruation. The *Didascalia*'s redactor clearly opposes abstinence from holy works and bathing during menstruation, though he may have concurred with the need for temporary abstinence from intercourse, according to the Latin translation though not the Syriac.[56] Even in the Syriac, the first two points are at the center of the *Didascalia*'s polemic while the third is mentioned only in passing. This would indicate that the former were more contentious in the redactor's community, a reasonable situation as these customs are public and more easily identified as Jewish, compared to the latter, which are private.

The *Didascalia*'s polemic against purification after menstruation is closely linked to baptismal theory. Like the *Pseudo-Clementines*, the *Didascalia* believes

[54] *Didascalia* 23, ed. Vööbus I.214, trans. Connolly, 202; marrying off their children is a duty of guardians and parents, *Didascalia* 22, trans. Connolly, 124. For the relationship between the Jewish Christianity of the *Ps.-Clementines* and the *Didascalia*, see Wehnert (1997), 179–84.

[55] *Didascalia* 1–3, trans. Connolly, 5, 9, 24. *Didascalia* 26, ed. Vööbus I.263, trans. III.245: "if a man should corrupt and defile (ܢܫܚܬ ܘܢܛܡܐ) a strange woman … or be polluted (ܢܬܛܡܐ) with a harlot … and be bathed in all the rivers, he cannot be made clean (ܢܬܕܟܐ)."

[56] Syriac: Vööbus, I.244; Latin: Connolly, 255. Connolly (*ibid*., n. 5), Cohen (1991), 290 and Stewart-Sykes (2009), 256 n. 141 believe the Syriac is primary and the Latin an emendation, but Vööbus (n. 229) and Zellentin (2013), nn. 37–9, deem the Latin primary and the Syriac a later emendation.

that baptism brings forgiveness of sins[57] and that the demons present in the hearts of all gentiles are removed by baptism.[58] However, based on its demonology, the *Didascalia* sees baptism and washings for ritual purity as mutually exclusive.[59] Turning to baptized Jewish women who refused to partake in the eucharist or study the scriptures until they were purified of their menstruation by washing, the author claims that their observances are illogical and abrogate their baptism. They are illogical because the Holy Spirit abided in them in baptism, driving away the impure spirits; it remains also when they are menstruating, and therefore there is no reason to abstain from eucharist or scriptures. They abrogate their baptism because they demonstrate their belief that baptism is insufficient to purify them, and that further purification is required.[60] This argument is based on the image of the person as a vessel that must be filled either by the Holy Spirit or by impure spirits, with no option of remaining "empty";[61] in baptism, the latter is replaced by the former.

The *Didascalia* thus represents the women's position as a conflation of purification from sexual defilement and purification from the pre-baptismal state, both based upon a pneumatical–demonological worldview. This spiritual interpretation of sexual purification, which allows the author to put it on the same level as baptism, is opposite to the usual Christian strategy of attacking Jewish purity laws by claiming that they relate only to the body. The *Pseudo-Clementines* appear to link the demonic only to baptism. From this perspective, purification from menstrual impurity has nothing to do with demons, since it is only a purification of the body, and not of the heart or of the soul; therefore, even if the heart is purified of sin, lust, and unclean spirits through baptism, this is no reason to neglect the purity of the body.

As Charlotte Fonrobert has shown, the pneumatological argument is only part of the question; at the basis of the controversy is an argument over loyalty to the Levitical laws.[62] According to the redactor, the purity laws of Leviticus are secondary, were received as a punishment for Israel's sins, and were since abrogated. The detail of seven days of purification indicates that Leviticus is at the background of the practice of these women, although the Bible does not call for abstinence from prayer or Scripture reading during menstruation.

[57] Chapters 20, 25. In chapter 20, the *Didascalia* appears to claim that baptism remits even post-baptismal sins, provided they are not "mortal" and the sinner has only "heard, or seen, or spoken." However, the passage is difficult; see 1 John 5:16–17 and the fragment from the *Gospel to the Hebrews* cited by Jerome, *adv. Pelag.* 3.2: "if your brother sinned to you with a word and makes amends, accept him seven times a day…for even among the prophets after they were anointed with the Holy Spirit, there were words of sin."

[58] *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26 (Vööbus (1979), II.240–1).

[59] For the relation of ritual purity to baptism in the *Didascalia*, see Kelly (1985), 128–9; Brakke (1995), 424–33; Fonrobert (2000), 172–82; Stewart-Sykes (2009), 278–86.

[60] *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26 (Vööbus I.238–41).

[61] This theory is already found in Hermas, *Man.* 5.24–27.

[62] Fonrobert (2000), 172–85.

Fonrobert argues that it is likely that the observant women indeed believed that the Holy Spirit departs in the time of their menses,[63] but this seems improbable: such a belief is too well suited for the redactor's refuting argument that only baptism and sin affect it.[64] It is more probable that the women would have based their custom on Leviticus, on an adaptation to new circumstances of the tradition of their (former?) Jewish community that menstruation is impure, or on medical/demonic explanations as found in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. Even if the women may not have voiced this argument themselves, however, the idea that the Holy Spirit departs during menstruation must have been comprehensible in the context of the third-century Jewish-Christian community in which the text was produced.

The *Didascalia* reflects opposing conceptions of anthropology and impurity: For the *Didascalia*'s opponents, impurity is temporary, caused by the body's rhythms, and is unconditioned upon baptism; it can be removed by washing and its main effect is on the degree of permissible contact with the holy. For the *Didascalia*'s compiler, it is a permanent condition, linked to the baptismal, and therefore pneumatic, status of the person; the degree of permissible contact with the holy is simply a result of his identity as baptized or not. David Brakke reconstructs the social situation at the basis of this argument: Christian communities attempting to define themselves both against the pagan majority and against the Jewish communities and their laws.[65] The focus on baptism as the ultimate and single purification, reflected in the body through the purity of single marriage and not through menstrual purity, served both identity interests at once.

As Fonrobert shows, very similar issues were discussed in the contemporary *Tosefta*:

> men and women with irregular genital emissions, women who menstruate and parturients are permitted to read the Torah, Prophets and Writings and to study mishna, midrash, religious law and aggadah; but men who had regular ejaculation are prohibited from all of these.[66]

The *Mishna* and *Tosefta* also discussed the permissibility of prayer for men with seminal emissions.[67] Thus adherence to the Levitical law by no means must lead to a prohibition of these activities when impure. However, the differences between the two texts are also noteworthy: for the *Didascalia*, abstinence from these activities forms the test case for obligation to Jewish

[63] Fonrobert (2000), 175.

[64] Fonrobert (2000), 178 writes that the women thought that "as their bodies bleed periodically, the Holy Spirit leaves and reenters their wombs." The *Didascalia*, however, does not mention the womb or any other organ as the habitation of spirits. Furthermore, *contra* Brakke (1995), 428, there is no suggestion that the women believe an impure spirit enters them during menstruation; it is only that the Holy Spirit departs, a less radical statement.

[65] See the insightful discussion in Brakke (1995), 428–30.

[66] *t. Ber.* 2.12.

[67] *m. Ber.* 3.4–5; *t. Ber.* 2.12–13.

purity laws; for the *Tosefta*, they are just marginal extensions of the main purity laws regarding menstruation and emissions. Second, the *Mishna* and *Tosefta* are mostly directed at men, while the *Didascalia* focuses on women.[68] Third, while the *Tosefta* only relates to reading and studying, the *Didascalia* speaks also of prayer and eucharist, perhaps reflecting differences in the participation of women in these rituals in the communities of the *Tosefta* and the *Didascalia*. The *Tosefta*, of course, does not have a clear parallel to the eucharist. As Shaye Cohen points out, the *Didascalia* appears to have a sacral conception of the religious rituals of the community which is generally lacking in the *Mishna*.[69]

## ELCHASAI AND THE ELCHASITES

Baptismal practices similar to those described in the *Didascalia* and the *Pseudo-Clementines* appear in two texts on group(s) claiming to be followers of a certain Elchasai, who, if he existed, was active in the second century. These texts are the *Cologne Mani Codex* (*CMC*), which describes the confrontation of the young Mani with a group labeled "the Baptists" and his rejection of their baptismal and dietary practices; and the accounts of the doctrines of Elchasai and his followers by patristic authors, especially in the *Refutation of all Heresies* attributed to Hippolytus. Both sources are hostile to the Elchasites, and should therefore be read cautiously.[70]

According to the *CMC*, the community from which Mani originated baptized daily and washed much of their food, practices which Mani opposed as being a futile attempt to purify the body instead of practicing true purification, which is "purification (καθαρότης) through gnosis, i.e., the separation (χωρισμός) of light from darkness, of death from life, of living waters from stagnant waters."[71] There is no clear indication of the function of these washings beyond their being "for purification" (ἀποκαθαρθέντες); it can only be assumed that they were similar to those described by the *Pseudo-Clementines*,

[68] Cohen (1991), 282–3, points out that according to these texts the only impurity which may cause a prohibition of such activities is that of semen. The Talmuds (*y. Ber.* 3.4, *b. Ber.* 22a) explain that the issue here is an attempt to reduce sexual activity; Kiperwasser (2012) understands this as the Talmud's response to a popular practice of post-coital immersion for purity.

[69] Cohen (1991), 287–90.

[70] The general scholarly opinion is that both sources are speaking of the same group, or at least that both relied on the same "Book of Elchasai" as a source for Elchasai's practice and doctrines. See Klijn and Reinink (1974); Henrichs (1979); Jones (2004). Luttikhuizen (1985), 163–6 dissents, arguing that the *CMC* and the other sources are speaking of different groups.

[71] 84.9–17. For the meaning, significance and origins of Mani's attack on the baptists' practices, see the studies in the previous note, as well as: Koenen (1981); Buckley (1986); Rudolph (1999); Stroumsa (1999), 268–81; Cirillo (2009), 45–60.

with the addition of washing food as well, in an attempt to maintain purity also inside the body. A hint to the meaning of these washings may be found in another *CMC* passage relating a confrontation between Elchasai, the "founder of your law," and water in which he attempted to bathe.

> When he was going to wash in the waters, an image of a man appeared to him from the spring of water and said to him: "Is it not sufficient that your animals [strike] me? But even you [yourself] maltreat [my place] and profane (ἀσεβεῖς) [my waters]." Therefore Elchasai [marveled and] said to it, "The fornication, defilement and impurity of the world (πορνεία καὶ ἡ μιαρότης καὶ ἡ ἀκαθαρσία τοῦ κόσμου) are thrown upon you and you do not refuse (them), but you are grieved at me."[72]

According to this story, Elchasai believed that washing in water was usually performed not only in order to remove "defilement and impurity" but also to purify "fornication."[73] This would point to washing for purification from sexual sin, which may or may not be identical or connected to the aforementioned daily baptisms. From the Manichaean viewpoint, the water has its own spirit which is profaned by washing, making purification through water difficult if not impossible. In general, however, the *CMC* provides us with little information on the meaning of washing for the baptist community, focusing on the alternative proposed by Mani.

Hippolytus describes two kinds of baptism taught by a follower of Elchasai, Alcibiades.[74] First, Alcibiades is cited as saying of one who desires to obtain forgiveness of sins,

> let him be baptized a second time in the name of the great and the most High God and in the name of his son, the mighty king. And let he himself purify and cleanse (καθαρισάσθω καὶ ἁγνευσάτω) himself and let him call upon those seven witnesses that have been described in this book, heaven, water, the holy spirits, the angels of prayer, oil, salt, and the earth . . .[75]

Thus this baptism, which was presumably a rare occurrence, included "purifying" and "cleansing," perhaps indicating the immersion in water itself or an accompanying exorcism. A few sentences later, this baptism is called a "conversion" and it is specified that it is to be performed while clothed. Alcibiades' baptism is therefore similar to a usual Christian initiatory baptism in the major

[72] 94.11–95.5. As Koenen (1981), 747–8 concedes, the baptists themselves would not have agreed with the Manichaean portrayal of these stories, and even if they thought they were true, they would probably have explained that under certain ritual conditions, purification in water is efficacious and not disrespectful to the water. See Henrichs and Koenen (1978), 181; Buckley (1986), 401 n. 9; Luttikhuizen (1985), 159.

[73] An alternative explanation for this sentence is that fornication and defilement are commonly washed off in water, though not for purposes of religious purification: this would accord with the "animals" mentioned, and correspond to *P. Oxy.* 840 lines 33–8; see above, p. 119. Bovon (2000), 727, comments on the general similarity between the *CMC* and *P. Oxy.* 840 in their criticism of water rites, but does not refer to this passage.

[74] See Luttikhuizen (1985), 70–84.

[75] Hipp. *Haer.* 9.15.1–2.

points: it effects a forgiveness of sins, is conceived of both as a purification and a conversion, and is performed in the name of God.

The second kind of baptism is against rabies, consumption, or demonic possession; these are healed through a baptism similar in its details to the first, but with the addition of an oath, attested by the aforementioned seven witnesses, not to sin in the future.[76] According to Andrea Nicolotti, the diseases were considered to be a result of demonic action; because of the traditional connection between sin and demons, abstaining from sin, together with a rite to distance demons, would lead to healing.[77] According to this interpretation, this baptism is basically an exorcism.

The baptisms described by Hippolytus are quite different from those of the *CMC*; they are performed on highly unusual occasions, and not daily; they are not connected with purifying the body or food as in the *CMC*, but rather with removing sin or demons from the person. The first kind of baptism appears to be modeled upon the typical Christian baptism, while the second kind is basically an exorcism, without the additional meanings of initiation. The common ground to both texts is the prevalence and importance of washings in the community going beyond a singular initiatory baptism, and their purificatory character. Hippolytus' description and that of the *CMC* are not contradictory; as seen in the *Pseudo-Clementines*, a number of washings with different functions were certainly possible in certain communities.

## *PROTEVANGELIUM* OF JAMES

This text, narrating the special birth and upbringing of Mary and the virgin birth of Jesus, is dated by most scholars to the late second or early third century.[78] Its provenance is unknown, but the case for Syria has recently been defended.[79] Mary's defining feature in the text is her purity, which is focused on her virginity but by no means restricted to it.[80] From her infancy, Mary is raised under strict purity conditions: Anna feeds her only after she has "purified herself from her impurity (*τῆς ἀφέδρου αὐτῆς*);" Mary is not allowed to walk outside, but is raised in a "sanctuary (*ἁγίασμα*)" in Anna's bedchamber,[81] through which "nothing common (*κοινόν*) or unclean (*ἀκάθαρτον*) was allowed to pass" (presumably referring to animals);[82] and she was cared for

[76] *Ibid*. 9.15.4–6. [77] Nicolotti (2008). [78] Cullman (1992).
[79] Vuong (2010), 251–313. [80] See Foskett (2005); Vuong (2010).
[81] Compare the hyperbolic description in *Mishna* and *Tosefta Parah* 3.2 of the children who drew the water for the purifying red cow ash mixture: they were born and raised in special enclosures and not allowed to walk on the ground lest they happen upon death defilement.
[82] Some read this simply as referring to abstaining from unclean food, see Acts 10:14, with Strycker (1961), 91 n.3.

only by "the undefiled (ἀμιάντους) daughters of the Hebrews." All of these restrictions are expansions for known purity principles: defilement of birth, of certain animals, and menstrual or sexual defilement. Mary is distanced from all of these impurities as if she was herself a sacred place or object. She is then taken to live in the temple, where she "received food from the hand of an angel." At the age of twelve the priests decide to put her under the care of Joseph, "lest perchance she defile the sanctuary of the Lord,"[83] presumably by menstruation; she is now called "the virgin of the Lord."[84]

From this point, the story focuses on Mary's virginity. She participates in spinning threads for the temple's veil, together with other undefiled virgins.[85] When she is found to be pregnant, Joseph laments: "Who has done this evil in my house and defiled (ἐμίανεν) her? . . . For as Adam was (absent) in the hour of his prayer and the serpent came and found Eve alone and deceived her and defiled (ἐμίανεν) her, so also has it happened to me."[86] Mary protests that she is pure (καθαρά), as does Joseph to the priests who accuse him of defiling (ἐμίανεν) her; they are both vindicated in a bitter water [*sotah*] test. Salome, who doubts that a virgin could give birth, examines Mary and her hand is burnt.[87]

The developed purity imagery of the text has been seen by some as proof of a linkage with Jewish and/or Jewish-Christian communities.[88] Although this cannot be ruled out, there is nothing specific in these details which could not have been imagined by a third-century Christian who knew his Bible as happening in first-century Jewish Jerusalem. Purity details play a significant role in the narrative: rather than compartmentalizing the various dimensions of purity, the *Protevangelium* combines them in order to extol the one most central to it, of virginity. The unique and exceptional purity restrictions of Mary's childhood shape her body into a fitting receptacle for the Holy Spirit, and form the backdrop for her unique virginity. Nevertheless, the writer's interest in such "Jewish" dimensions of purity is unusual. Despite her august status, Mary is not exempt from menstrual defilement, at least according to neutrally-portrayed temple priests. This indicates, though does not prove, that the author thought menstruation to be defiling for contemporary women too. More generally, it shows that the author understood—as opposed to most Christian writers of

[83] *Prot. Jas.* 8.2. Glancy (2010), 109–14, argues (unconvincingly in my opinion) that *Prot. Jas.* believes Mary was never polluted by menstruation.

[84] *Prot. Jas.* 9.1.

[85] *Prot. Jas.* 10.1–2. It is unclear if this means only that they were virgins or also pure from menstruation. See discussion in Nir (2003), 100–17.

[86] *Prot. Jas.* 13.1; compare 2 Cor 11:3, 1 Tim 2:14, *Acts of Andrew* 7. For Adam's absence, see *Greek Life of Adam and Eve* 7.2.

[87] *Prot. Jas.* 20.1; compare *Acts of Thomas* 51, Cyprian, *Laps.* 25–26, for similar powers of the eucharist against sinners.

[88] See Mach (1985); Vuong (2010). Glancy (2010), 110, sees the text in the context of general "Greco-Roman purity habitus."

this time—that for Jews, ritual impurity does not necessarily entail negative moral value.[89]

## SUMMARY

The survey of issues of baptism and sexual purity in Jewish-Christian texts demonstrates the wide variety of washing rituals that were practiced in these communities: daily washings for ascetic purity; washings for purification from sexual defilement; washing as an instrument for exorcism and healing, and initiatory baptism. A variety of purificatory meanings were assigned to initiatory baptism: for forgiveness of sins, for purification from the first birth of desire, and for release and protection from demons. Although all of the washings had some purificatory role, they appeared to have different functions and were not necessarily linked. For the writer of the *Pseudo-Clementines*, at least, the multiplicity of washings does not appear to have been strange or incoherent, and no attempt was made to work out their relationship to each other. The writer of the *Didascalia*, on the other hand, assumes that initiatory baptism and washings for purification from sexual defilement have a similar purificatory function, understood pneumatically. This understanding collapses the multiple levels of purity discourse which apparently existed in the community to one level, in which impurity and purity are necessarily borne and manipulated through spirits, and only through them. The sources on the Elchasites, with all their variety, also indicate the importance of the demonic world in rituals of washing and purification, and the possibility of a multiplicity of washing rites.

Both the *Didascalia* and the *Pseudo-Clementines* are preoccupied with menstrual impurity to an extent not found in contemporary texts. The *Didascalia* and the *Pseudo-Clementines* demonstrate the variety of justifications that could arise for menstrual impurity in their milieus: demonology, medicine, "common" morality, or Jewish law. Menstrual impurity is important specifically in texts which see marriage as legitimate and even required; this is true also of Clement of Alexandria. Apparently, menstrual impurity is a more apt subject for discussion (even if contentious, as the *Didascalia* proves) when the focus is not on sexuality itself as an impurity, and when procreation is perceived as a virtue.

Dietary law occupies a significant place only in the *Pseudo-Clementines* and it is limited to the traditional items of the *Apostolic Decree*—blood, meat with blood, and food offered to idols.[90] All of these are linked to the demons, who provide a common ontology for impurity.

[89] See Vuong (2010), 157–68.

[90] The *Didascalia* mentions a group which abstains from pork but does not elaborate.

The texts in this section attest that among some Christian communities, probably in Syria, there is a continuation of customs of purification from genital emissions, whether arising from Jewish law or from general practice, which the local non-Jewish population practiced as well. These customs took place in parallel to initiatory washing, or baptism, which was strongly linked to sexual sin. Thus in these communities the sexual sphere was prominent in all levels of water purification. Furthermore, demonology was central to the understanding of water purification on all levels, and served at times as a common denominator for relating to it.

# 9

# The Origenist Synthesis

Origen, born in 185, was by far the most prolific and influential Christian scholar of the third century writing in Greek. His immense corpus, only partially extant and mostly in Latin translation, includes several genres—anti-pagan apologetic in the *Contra Celsum*, a theological-philosophical treatise in *On First Principles*, and spiritual guidance in *On Prayer* and *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*—but especially biblical exegesis in numerous homilies and commentaries on both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is dominant in Origen's writing, to an extent not found earlier. Besides the unprecedented exegetical focus, his writing is interwoven with biblical allusions and citations, and his language is strongly influenced by that of the Bible. At the same time, Origen received an extensive philosophical education, and Plato (and to a lesser degree Aristotle and the Stoa) had a significant impact on his thought, though there is much controversy concerning the weights of these influences relative to the Bible.[1] Furthermore, Origen's thought is clearly indebted to the Alexandrians, Philo (whom he mentions several times) and Clement (whom he does not); the influence of Valentinian writers on the one hand and the Rabbis on the other is more controversial.[2]

Origen's writings include major discussions of purity and defilement, ranging across all the areas discussed in this thesis—food, death, sex, and baptism.[3] In all of these areas he takes much from his predecessors, and nevertheless is almost always innovative; it is only with Origen that purity and defilement are reconsidered systematically and broadly as Christian concepts. Therefore, I chose Origen as the chronological end-point of this study, as a culmination of trends found in the second-century authors. As a background to the question of the role and meaning of purity, I shall briefly discuss three major aspects of Origen's work: anthropology, biblical hermeneutic, and the relationship with Judaism.

[1] See Crouzel (1961); Chadwick (1966), 66–94; Edwards (2002).

[2] See de Lange (1976); Strutwolf (1993); Edwards (2002), 11–46; Markschies (2004).

[3] The only study I know which relates to a number of purity dimensions in Origen's writings is Tzvetkova-Glaser (2010), 359–96; this study, however, rarely goes beyond the *Homilies on Leviticus*.

Origen held to a tripartite model of the human as composed of spirit, soul, and body.[4] The spirit is the divine element in the person, and is totally immaterial; it cannot be directly influenced by the person's actions, but can be obstructed or supported by them. The soul, which is the seat of personality and free will, includes a number of aspects, sometimes divided according to Platonic psychology (the *logistikon*, *epithymetikon*, and *thymikon*) and sometimes according to other schemas (e.g., the *nous*, *hegemonikon*, "the heart," created according to the image of God, and the passions or the "fleshly soul"). The moral status of the body is ambiguous.[5] In principle it is neutral, since good and evil come only from the decisions of the soul; however, Origen frequently speaks with qualifications of the body as evil in some way, a notion to which defilement is strongly linked. Furthermore, the degree of materiality of the body is determined according to the spiritual level of the created being: angels, demons, and humans have different kinds of bodies, and the essence of the human body also changes according to its spiritual stage (e.g., in the resurrection, on heaven or on earth).

Since Origen was first and foremost an exegete, his biblical hermeneutics are the key to his thought. Frances Young states that with Origen, the Bible first became a Classic, i.e., a text which serves as the foundation for *paideia*, the comprehensive education at the basis of elite culture.[6] This transformation, based on the conception of scripture as an embodiment of the *logos*, had a number of ramifications. It entailed the multivalence of scripture, since different levels of understanding apply to people at different stages of their spiritual development; and it led to acute attention to the Bible in its entirety and to every detail of the scriptural text.[7] For my purposes, this innovative hermeneutic meant that references to purification in the Old Testament received serious attention by Origen, and furthermore that they were understood by him on multiple levels: as relating to actual practice and as relating to psychological and spiritual advancement. As Origen's well-known parallelism of the senses of scripture to tripartite human anthropology shows, the "spiritual" or the "psychic" senses are not independent of each other or of the "literal" sense. The relationship between these levels of understanding was not uniform, shifting according to theological and polemical interests: at times Origen simply discards the "literal" sense of the verses, while elsewhere he retains this sense, integrating it with the psychological or spiritual sense.[8]

[4] For Origen's anthropology, see Crouzel (1955); Crouzel (1989), 87–98; Edwards (2002), 87–122; Blosser (2012).

[5] See discussion in Blosser (2012), 38–59.

[6] Young (1997), 292–4.

[7] See Crouzel (1989), 61–84.

[8] For the relationship of the literal and higher senses see Dawson (2001), 65–82; for that of the psychic and spiritual, Dively Lauro (2005).

Origen's relationship to Judaism is expressed primarily through his biblical hermeneutics.[9] Although some of his interpretations were borrowed from Jews and his philological project took the Hebrew text of the Old Testament as primary, his basic argument was that Jewish readers of the Bible do not recognize Christian salvation, expressed in the higher/spiritual sense of scripture, because of their literalist exegesis. This argument is central for his common binary opposition of Jewish ritual purity to Christian moral or spiritual purity. At the same time, protecting Jewish laws from pagan attacks served his polemical interests in the *Contra Celsum*, and many of the traditions most sympathetic to them are found here. These exegetical dynamics made for a much more nuanced reception of biblical statements on purity issues than was found earlier.

## FOOD

### Food offered to idols

Origen elaborates on the subject of food offered to idols in two long passages: in the *Contra Celsum* (8.28–30), and in his *Commentary on Matthew* (11.12). In both instances Origen begins with an exposition of the Jewish position on dietary laws, goes on to explain Jesus' views on inner and outer purity, and emphasizes that true defilement can only be a result of evil thoughts or deeds and not of material food. He then proceeds to contend with the question of food offered to idols. Although Origen does not say so explicitly, the arrangement of ideas indicates that he is aware of the apparent contradiction between an emphasis on internal purity and the prohibition of certain foods. In the *Contra Celsum*, Origen does not add any new solution for this problem beyond what is found in Paul and in Clement of Alexandria, but expands their demonological focus: all three prohibitions of the Apostles' Decree are explained as linked to demons: blood draws demons, and strangled animals still have their blood in them; eating blood, "we might have such spirits feeding along with us," and then we are "joining the table of demons." This grouping of idols, demons, and blood returns to the mythologies of *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* (above, pp. 49–50) and is paralleled in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. Elsewhere, Origen explains that the blood prohibition was expressly directed by Leviticus (17:13–14) at both Israelites and foreigners, and therefore it is universal and binding upon Christians, but does not explain the prohibition's rationale.[10]

[9] See de Lange (1976); McGuckin (1992), and bibliographies there.

[10] Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 2.9.18–19 (Brésard I.390–92; trans. Scheck, I.151); this is also implied, but not explicit, in Justin, *Dial.* 20.1; Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 15.3. In the *Dialogue with Heraclides* 11 (trans. Chadwick, 452), however, Origen refuses to identify the soul with actual blood, or to relate to the prohibition on blood as a practical one.

In the *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen emphasizes the aspect of knowledge or doubt of eating sacrifices, which causes a person to "eat not in faith"; by this, he can then distance the defilement from the material food, through an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8:7 that applies it to the imagination of the man eating it instead of to the food itself:

> And the man who knowing that they have been sacrificed to demons nevertheless uses them, becomes a communicant with demons, while at the same time, his imagination (φαντασίας) is polluted (μεμολυσμένης) on account of the demons participating in the sacrifice. And the Apostle, however, knowing that it is not the nature (φύσιν) of foods which is the cause of injury to him who uses them or of advantage to him who refrains from their use, but opinions and the reason which is in them, says "But food commends us not to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we eat not are we the worse."[11]

It is not the sacrifice that pollutes but the demons, and the demons do not pollute the person as a whole, but rather his mind pollutes the sacrifice because the mind believes it is polluted. Origen returns to this rather subtle point in his *Commentary on Romans*:

> And you should not be surprised that the reflection of the mind makes food defiled that, of its own nature, is neither common nor defiled, though simplicity of mind and the absence of scrupulosity of reflection . . . absolves truly defiled food (*cibum vere pollutum*)—for what is sacrificed to idols is truly defiled. And, again, even if the food is pure, nevertheless someone may come under suspicion, as would be the case when what has been sacrificed to idols is said to be defiled on account of a scrupulous conscience.[12]

Here it appears that there are two levels of impurity: "true defilement" which is inherent in food sacrificed to idols, but which is annulled by "simplicity of mind," that is, by not believing in its power; and the defilement on account of conscience, which is secondary—but still present and significant enough to prohibit the food. For Origen, the sacrifices are a material stepping-stone between the demon-world and the mind of humans, both spiritual; the presence of sacrifices is required for the demons to pollute the mind, but they themselves are not polluted. Origen attempts to diminish the role of the material sacrifices by expanding the role of the two spiritual agents—the demons on the one side and the mind of humans on the other—but he cannot escape the fact that sacrifices are still somehow required to transfer pollution.

Origen's emphasis that food is not impure *by nature* alerts the reader to another motivation for his position. Much of Origen's writing in the *Commentary on Romans* is driven by polemic against the determinism he (with earlier

[11] *Comm. Matt.* 11.12 (Klostermann 54; trans. *ANF* IX.441).
[12] *Comm. Rom.* 9.42.4 (Brésard IV.244; trans. Scheck, II.250).

Christian writers) ascribed to the "gnostics" Basilides and Valentinus.[13] These figures, according to Origen, taught that a person's fate is decided before birth, and accordingly that there is a good or evil "nature" inherent in people. Against this view, Origen emphasizes the importance of free will and choice.[14] Thus Paul's original teachings on dietary impurity, which probably related to some type of Jewish dietary laws, are pressed into service as both anti-gnostic and anti-Jewish polemic. As I will argue, a similar double motivation is found also in the rest of Origen's writings on impurity.

## Understanding the biblical dietary rules

Origen's understanding of the relationship between impurity and nature in the case of idol-offering came into play also in his interpretations of the dietary laws of Leviticus. The passages in the *Commentary on Romans* and the *Commentary on Matthew* cited above feature discussions on the principles of food purity, formulated by integrating Jesus' sayings (Matt 15/Mark 7) with the opinions of Paul (Rom 14, 1 Cor 10, Col 2, and 1 Tim 4), read as pertaining to food in general and the biblical dietary laws in particular. The Levitical dietary laws cannot be taken at face value, as all animals and material things were created by the good God; therefore, there cannot be a distinction in value between them as regards their essential nature, including of purity and impurity.[15] Impurity can affect material things, however, when they are incorporated into the human world, through human attitudes towards them. Specifically, there are two ways in which food can become impure: when eating it may harm someone else (Rom 14:20), and when the person eating it believes it is impure (Rom 14:14). This shows that "impurity and defilement consist not in things or in essences, but in actions and thoughts."[16] This "internal" understanding of purity is opposed to the Jewish "external" and "fleshly" understanding.[17]

However, this principle, which appears to do away with any essential food impurity, was only one side of a multi-faceted approach. Origen in fact deploys four different strategies in the interpretation of the dietary laws: symbolic, historical, natural, and demonological. As opposed to most of his predecessors, Origen's discussions are strongly rooted in the biblical text he is commenting on, and his first priority is therefore explaining the text according to his unique hermeneutic. This has a number of consequences: First, there are quite different approaches to the dietary laws in different parts of Origen's massive corpus, according to specific exegetical or polemical needs. Origen's interpretation of

[13] Löhr (1992); Bagby (2014).
[14] *Comm. Rom.* 1.1, 4.12, 8.11; *Comm. Matt.* 10.11; *Princ.* 2.9.5, 3.1; *Philocalia* 25, 27.
[15] *Comm. Rom.* 9.42.3; 10.3.1–4; *Comm. Matt.* 11.12.
[16] *Comm. Rom.* 10.3.2 (Brésard IV.278).
[17] *Comm. Matt.* 11.12; *Comm. Rom.* 9.42.8.

the dietary laws required justification in the face of pagan criticisms, as well as defense from Jewish or Jewish-Christian arguments that they should be practiced as written in the Bible. Both of these contexts are found in Origen's writings: in the *Contra Celsum* he defends the logic of the dietary laws, criticized by Celsus, while his biblical exegesis opposes accusations by the "bodily Jews and the Ebionites who differ little from them" that the Christians transgress the laws and that Origen's allegorical interpretation "does violence to scripture."[18] Second, purity language features heavily in Origen's discussions, as a reflection of its importance in the biblical texts. Third, the significant discussions of food purity in the gospels and in Paul, hardly mentioned by second-century authors, receive detailed attention.

Symbolic explanations of the dietary laws are propounded at length in the *Homilies on Leviticus* (7.6–7).[19] Origen starts by justifying his allegorical hermeneutic by linking Paul's allusion to "spiritual food" (1 Cor 10:1–4) to the understanding of food laws as the "shadow of future things" (Col 2:16), showing that the laws should be read according to the spirit not the letter. He then cites Peter's vision and its interpretation, which demonstrates that the dietary laws "should be interpreted as pertaining to humans." These prooftexts indicate that the target of Origen's polemic was not Jews, but rather Christians who practiced the dietary laws, such as the Ebionites he explicitly mentions.

In his symbolic exegesis, interpretations of the impure animals as evil traits along the lines of *Barnabas* are marginalized in favor of a more general approach to food as a symbol for human interaction:

> Every person has in himself some food which he gives to his neighbour … For it cannot happen that, when we approach each other as human beings and join in conversation, we do not either take or give some food between us either by a response, or by a question, or by some gesture. Indeed, if the person from whom we take food is pure (*mundus*) and of a sound mind, we receive pure (*mundum*) food. But if he whom we touch (*contingimus*) is impure, we receive impure food.[20]

The symbolic impurity of animals, therefore, does not express only prohibition, but also contagion. Words as well as other forms of communication are the bearers of this impurity, which comes out of a person's mouth. Origen, like Clement and *Sextus*, is using here the Matthean version of Jesus' saying on true impurity which "comes out of the mouth."[21]

[18] *Comm. Matt.* 11.12; *Hom. Lev.* 4.7.1.

[19] See also *Hom. Lev.* 3.3.4–5 (Baehrens 305–6), where he allegorizes the impurity of the touching of carcasses of pure and impure animals, and *Hom. Ps.*, Hom. 2 in Ps. 77 (Perrone 377), where the impure birds are allegorized.

[20] *Hom. Lev.* 7.5.2; (Baehrens 386; trans. Barkley, 145). Cf. *Sel. Lev.* on Lev 5:2, *PG* 12.400.

[21] See *Cels.* 8.29 (Marcovich 544): "the things which come out of the mouth are evil thoughts which are spoken aloud, murders, adulteries, fornications … "; *Comm. Matt.* 11.12 (Klostermann 53): "we are defiled when … we speak offhand and discuss matters we ought not."

Elsewhere, Origen deploys a historical argument, but more sympathetically than Justin: the dietary laws served in the past for "distinguishing God's special people from nations that the ignorance of God and the worship of idols were making impure (*faciebat immundas*),"[22] a notion perhaps adopted from the *Letter of Aristeas*. With Jesus' coming and the purification of the nations through faith, all foods were purified, in order to facilitate Christianity's expansion.[23]

Origen also interprets food impurity in an ascetic mode: foods eaten "for the love of pleasure" are impure. What matters is therefore not the type of food eaten, but how food is used, in what amounts, and for what objective, since even heretics, pagans, and magicians abstain from meat and wine as part of their rituals, while the Pythagoreans do so because of their belief in reincarnation.[24] This understanding of alimentary asceticism as a form of purity is relatively marginal in Origen's writings, and as opposed to Clement it is not used to explain the dietary laws.

From the passages cited above from the *Commentary on Matthew* and *on Romans*, it would seem that food impurity for Origen has nothing to do with the animal itself. Yet precisely the opposite stance is taken elsewhere. Impurity of animals is first mentioned in the Pentateuch in Genesis, when Noah is told to bring seven of every pure animal but only two of the impure. This raises the question:

> Since the law of pure and impure was not yet in existence, how did Noah know what was impure to say thus? You should understand this according to what is said "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law;" Noah knew this by natural law (ἀπὸ τοῦ φύσει νόμου).[25]

Noah's impure animals were especially disturbing, since they existed long before the Exodus, when the historical reasons given by Justin and Origen were not yet relevant. Origen's natural law solution does little to alleviate the situation. The idea that the patriarchs fulfilled parts of the law through innate understanding was well-known in second- and third-century writers (as well as Philo), but this typically refers to moral commandments still binding on Christians, and not ritual ones they rejected.[26] Natural law does not cohere with the understanding of impurity as a product of the human mind, but rather

[22] *Comm. Rom.* 10.3.2; (Brésard IV.278; trans. adapted from Scheck, 258). For this argument in the *Letter of Aristeas*, see above, p. 48.

[23] *Comm. Rom.* 10.3.2; *Cels.* 8.28. Cf. *Cels.* 5.49.

[24] *Cels.* 5.49; *Comm. Matt.* 11.12; *Comm. Rom.* 9.42.4.

[25] Origen, *Sel. Gen.*, *PG* 12:105 (Metzler fr. E10, p. 209). For natural law in Origen, see Banner (1954); as relevant for animals as well, see *Cels.* 4.83. For purity in Noah's time and the relationship of purity and nature in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim exegesis, see Blidstein (2015).

[26] See Justin, *Dial.* 44–46; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.16.3; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 2.2–10, with de Jonge (1985); Rokeah (2002); Inowlocki (2010). For law of nature in Philo, see Horsley (1978); Najman (1999); and in Second Temple Judaism generally, Bockmuehl (1995).

raises the possibility of a natural and universal source of impurity, relevant not only for Jews but for gentiles as well. Origen does not provide any clue here as to what may have been the natural law criteria differentiating pure and impure animals, and whether it was identical to the laws of Leviticus.

A gloss on God's commandment to Noah provides further information on Origen's opinion. Justin used the verse "every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything (Gen 9:3)" to argue against the dietary laws. Origen does the opposite, by clarifying that "every moving thing" does not include the snake family, "for it is considered of the wild animals (θηρίοις); but rather those whose nature (πέφυκεν) is to be eaten, crickets and grasshoppers and the like."[27] In this case, Origen aligns the primeval commandment to Noah with the Levitical laws (which explicitly permit crickets and grasshoppers but prohibit snakes), and explains that a similar prohibition was in force for all wild animals. Wildness and carnivorousness as the traits of the impure birds are emphasized already by *Aristeas* (144), and in his *Commentary on Leviticus*, Origen says briefly that all wild animals are impure and represent cruel people.[28] Thus the dietary laws were, in fact, based on a natural, objective criterion, that of wildness and cruelty to other animals. This criterion was known already to Noah, perhaps based on natural law which prohibits stealing and cruelty to others.[29]

This naturalistic conception is at the basis of yet another of Origen's dietary law theories, developed primarily in the *Contra Celsum* as part of a discussion of demons and divination. Origen claims that demons have a stronger hold on "the most rapacious wild beasts and other very wicked animals" than on tame animals, because "animals of this sort have something about them resembling evil, and although it is not evil yet it is like it"; wild animals are therefore more efficacious for divination. Moses learnt of this demonic preference (from his own reason or through God's assistance), and prohibited as impure those animals to which the demons have a predilection.[30] The ambiguous evil or impurity of the wild animals themselves is only a secondary reason for their prohibition: the correlation of wildness with demonic possession is the real

[27] *Fr. Gen.* fr. E17 (Metzler 214 = fr. 758 Petit). For the opposition between such pure insects and the impure snake, see Philo, *Leg.* 2.105.

[28] *Sel. Lev.* on Lev 11:2, *PG* 12.401A; Justin, too, said that God made the violent animals impure (above, p. 88), but only temporarily, while here impurity is primeval. Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 2.16–17, already explained that although all animals were created equally good, the wild animals later became evil, "for when man transgressed, they also transgressed with him." The animals will return to their original purity in the eschaton. In *Hom. Ez.* 11.3.3 Origen picks up this idea, claiming that all wild animals will return in the future to their original tameness and purity. For an identical medieval Jewish view, see *Midrash Psalms* 146; and compare *Ber. Rab.* 20.5, stating all animals will be "healed" in the future except for the snake.

[29] See, e.g., Cicero, *Off.* 3.29–31; and compare *4 Macc.* 5.25–6, where Eliezer argues that the dietary laws were made by God to suit human nature, as opposed to Antiochus' claim that pork is a "gift of nature," which it is unjust to turn away (5.9).

[30] *Cels.* 4.92–3 (Marcovich 309–10; trans. Chadwick, 257). This explanation also appears briefly in *Hom. Num.* 16.7.13.

reason.[31] Through this correlation, Origen finds a site for the animal's impure status which can be more easily managed than that of natural impurity arising from wildness. After all, wild animals remained wild even after Jesus, but the power of demons can be weakened, at least for Christians.[32]

Origen thus provides a wide variety of avenues of interpretation: historical, symbolic, natural, and demonic. The first two of these are common in earlier Christian exegesis, but the latter two are innovative; they are, moreover, somewhat dangerous to the Christian side of the anti-Law polemic, since they provide an opening for arguing that the dietary laws have not lost their relevance. And yet, the demonic and the symbolic explanations are closer than appears at first. Both are methods of "spiritualization" of the animal: symbolically, by equating impure animals and evil human beings, and psychologically, by peering into the animal's soul and discerning there a demonic spirit. Origen's interpretation comes full circle when it is compared to his imaginative use of bestial images to express the inner workings of the human soul.[33] The demonic identification of wild animals appears also in slightly later works such as the *Life of Anthony*, where the saint fights the animal-demons sent to intimidate him: "in the *Life of Antony*... There is a clear connection between demons that appear as animals, animals that obey the command of the Devil and animals of flesh and blood, which are evil because of their inherent bestial nature."[34]

Origen developed a general theory of dietary impurity by applying the Pauline perspective on biblical exegesis and on food impurity, originally pertaining to food offered to idols, to the biblical dietary laws. Through this application, the dietary laws were rejected as practical precepts, since they did not meet the criteria he developed from the Pauline discussions. Food, for him, exemplified a more general issue of the meaning of purity and impurity of the material world, its sources and meaning. At the same time, Origen also sought to explain the logic behind the dietary laws through second-century symbolic and historical perspectives, and through his innovative natural and demonological explanations.

[31] Demonic possession is also Origen's explanation for the NT's frequent use of *koinos* to denote impurity: "because [the person] is possessed not by one spirit but by many, on that account such a man is called common, as one who is a slave to many vices or demons" (*Comm. Rom.* 9.42.2, Brésard IV.244).

[32] *Hom. Ez.* 11.3.4: The purification and taming of the wild animals "had been done in part even now, and will be completed in the second coming."

[33] Cox (1982). See further on the blurring of boundaries between wild animals and demons in late antique Judaism and Christianity, especially in Origen's thought: Crouzel (1956), 197–206; Williams (2006); Gilhus (2006), 205–26. For Origen's demonology in general, see Ferguson (1989); Crouzel (1994); Marx-Wolf (2010b).

[34] Gilhus (2006), 223; cf. *Life of Anthony* 39.3; 51.5. See further Brakke (2006), 31–2, who claims that "Jews and Christians traditionally interpreted the unclean animals in the Septuagint as symbolizing demons," but with no corroboration for this statement. In many texts, beasts and demons occupy the same space or are closely identified; see, e.g., *T. Naph.* 8; Rev 13, 18:2; 1 Pet 5:8; *Apoc. Mos.* 16; *Teachings of Silvanus* 105.26–106.14; Lucian, *Philopseudes* 31. However, I do not know of a pre-third-century demonological interpretation of Lev 11.

## BAPTISM

Origen speaks of baptism on four levels—of water, of spirit, and of fire, as well as Old Testament types of Christian baptism. In all of these levels, baptism is frequently described as purification.[35] Like his predecessors, Origen sees baptism as a unique opportunity for forgiveness of sins,[36] which he describes as washed away and purified: "you descend into the water and come out unimpaired, the filth of sins having been washed away."[37] Frequently baptism is just described as purification, without specifying that it is sin which is removed, though this can be understood from the context.[38]

Origen oscillates between washing and purification as images of baptism itself and of the repentance or good works preparing for baptism. Thus, commenting on the washing of garments before the Sinai revelation, he says:

> No one, therefore, can hear the word of God unless he has first been sanctified, that is, unless he is holy in body and spirit (*sanctus corpore et spiritu*), unless he has washed (*laverit*) his garments. For a little later he shall go in to the wedding dinner, he shall eat from the flesh of the lamb, he shall drink from the cup of salvation. Let no one go in to this dinner with dirty (*sordidis*) garments…for your garments were washed (*lota*) once when you came to the grace of baptism; you were purified (*purificatus*) in body; you were cleansed from all filth of flesh and spirit (*mundatus es ab omni inquinamento carnis ac spiritus*). What, then, God has cleansed (*mundavit*), you shall not make unclean (*immunda*).[39]

The purification of body, flesh, and spirit (undifferentiated in this passage), symbolized by the washing of garments, all occur in baptism. This purification is clearly a preparation for what follows—eucharist and hearing God's word. Similarly, Origen says that the "mystery of baptism" cleanses from "the filth of leprosy,"[40] or more directly, that "the bath through water is a symbol of the purification (*καθαρσίου*) of the soul."[41]

[35] On baptism in Origen, see Hanson (1959), 311–33; Blanc (1972); Saxer (1988), 145–94; Crouzel (1989), 223–6; Ferguson (2006); Hällström (2010).

[36] *Mart.* 30; cf. *Hom. Jud.* 7.2. Baptism as forgiveness or purification of sins is mentioned in *Comm. Rom.* 5.9; *Hom. Gen.* 13.4; *Hom. Ex.* 2.4; *Hom. Jos.* 15.7 and other passages discussed below. Trigg (1982) speaks of "the relative insignificance of the forgiveness of sins in his understanding of baptism." It is difficult to see what supports such a statement.

[37] *Hom. Ex.* 5.5 (Baehrens 190), where baptism purifies from "the Egyptians" who attempt to follow the baptizand, symbolizing "the rulers of this world" or "spiritual evils." This is the only explicit case in Origen's works, to the best of my knowledge, in which baptism works against demonic forces (cf. more implicitly in *Hom. Ex.* 8.4, *Hom. Lev.* 8.11). Thus while demons are quite central to Origen's general moral system (see Ferguson [1989]), they are marginal to his baptismal thought.

[38] *Hom. Ex.* 11.7; *Hom. Lev.* 9.4.4; *Hom. Luc.* 33.5; *Comm. Jo.* 6.48.

[39] *Hom. Ex.* 11.7 (Baehrens 261). Note Origen's use here of the verse relating to the purification of foods/gentiles (Acts 11:9) in a baptismal context.

[40] *Hom. Luc.* 33.5. [41] *Comm. Jo.* 6.33.166–7 (Preuschen 142–3).

Elsewhere, however, it is pre-baptismal repentance which is symbolized through washing and purification: "it is the Law of God which washes you (*te lavat*). This cleanses your filthiness (*sordes tuas diluit*). This… removes the stains (*maculas*) of your sins… you, who desire to receive holy baptism and to obtain the grace of the Spirit, first you ought to be cleansed (*purgati*) by the Law."[42] Here, baptism is not a preparation for a further spiritual stage, but rather a level which a person can hope to attain following sufficient purification through moral work. Similarly, in the *Contra Celsum*, in a passage comparing Christian catechumens to initiates of the Mysteries, Origen says that catechumens are "purified (κεκαθάρθαι) by the logos," and only then "are called to the mysteries,"[43] as these are "delivered only to the holy and pure (ἁγίοις καὶ καθαροῖς)… God's initiates who have been purified in soul (κεκαθαρμένοις τὴν ψυχήν)."[44] In other passages, Origen even says that baptism without cessation of sin and repentance does not effect forgiveness of sins.[45] These two options, of baptism as an objective of prior purification or as purification in itself, are not contradictory: pre-baptismal moral instruction and repentance as well as baptism itself, and even life after baptism, are all an extended process of purification.[46]

But how does baptism itself remit sins and purify a person who is sufficiently prepared for it? And how is the person transformed in this process? In his *Commentary on John*, Origen was led to this question by the necessity of explaining the difference between the baptism of John and that instituted by Jesus:

> I [John], baptize you in water unto repentance, purifying you (καθαίρων), as it were… and exhorting you to repentance. For I have come to prepare for the Lord… and by the baptism of repentance, to make ready a place for the one who will come after me… for his baptism is not corporeal, since the Holy Spirit fills the one who repents, and a more divine fire removes everything material (θειοτέρου πυρὸς πᾶν ὑλικὸν ἀφανίζοντος), and utterly destroys everything earthly (γεώδες ἐξαναλίσκοντος).[47]

From this passage, it would appear that Jesus' baptism (= Christian baptism) is not corporeal, and that its sole function was to grant the Holy Spirit. However,

[42] *Hom. Lev.* 6.2.4 (Baehrens 361).

[43] *Cels.* 3.59 (Marcovich 200). Cf. 3.51.

[44] *Cels.* 3.60 (Marcovich 200).

[45] *Hom. Luc.* 21.4, 22.5–6; *Comm. Jo.* 6.33.165. In *Hom. Ezek.* 6.5, *Hom. Num.* 3.1, and *Comm. Rom.* 5.8.3, Origen clarifies that not all who are externally baptized receive salvation or the Holy Spirit; it is only those who have made a moral choice.

[46] See Raasch (1968), 40–2; Auf der Maur and Waldram (1981), 43–51, who understand the stages of catechumenate and baptism as part of one long "sacramental process," through which the Word of God purifies the person. See further Trigg (1982) concerning purification from sin following baptism.

[47] *Comm. Jo.* 6.32.162 (Preuschen 141). For discussions of Origen's baptismal theology in book 6 of the *Comm. Jo.*, see Hanson (1959), 320–1; Blanc (1972), 116–18; Auf der Maur and Waldram (1981), 89–94; Crouzel (1989), 226; Ferguson (2006), 122–3. These scholars are interested more in what Origen has to say on the relationship of the baptismal act with reception of the Holy Spirit than in purification and forgiveness of sins.

the passage should be read in its context of a comparison of John's baptism with that of Jesus. In the latter the baptizand also receives the Holy Spirit, while the former was solely for purification; John's baptism was corporeal and visible, while that of Jesus is incorporeal, and destroys the material.[48] The similarities between the baptisms of John and Jesus, however, still stand: the baptism of Jesus is also performed in physical water, upon persons who are a mix of body and soul. Furthermore, it too includes a purificatory aspect—it provides forgiveness of sins and requires repentance.[49] Another passage in the *Commentary on John* goes further in explaining the exact relationship between the washing in water, the purification of the soul, and the granting of the Holy Spirit:

> the washing (λουτρόν) though the water, which is a symbol (σύμβολον) of the soul's purification (καθαρσίου) as it washes from itself all the filth (ῥύπον) which comes from evil, is no less also in itself the beginning and source of divine gifts to the one who surrenders to the divinity of the power of the invocation of the venerable Trinity…the Spirit resided so manifestly in those being baptized, the water having prepared (προευτρεπίσαντος) the way for the Spirit for those who sincerely approached.[50]

Thus the immersion in water as a physical medium has a double function: it is a symbol of the purification of the soul and it prepares the way for the Holy Spirit. Origen is the first writer who relates clearly to the relationship between outer and inner, the purification of the body and that of the soul: one, he says, is a symbol of the other. However, the meaning of σύμβολον is not at all clear in this context: is the physical act a "mere symbol," only reflecting the real transformation which is happening inside the person but not playing an active role in it, or is it an efficacious symbol, in which the physical act is of real consequence?[51]

As used by Origen, as well as for Justin and Clement, σύμβολον usually connotes an external sign or mark for some more significant reality, and is frequently used in the context of interpretation of the Old Testament through

[48] The idea of fire and the Holy Spirit working against the material or earthly elements in baptism is already familiar from Clement. For the earthly in the soul, see also *Hom. Gen.* 13.4, and compare *Acts of Thomas* 58 (cited above, p. 130). In *Comm. Matt.* 15.23 (Klostermann 417–18), Origen speaks of Jesus' baptism of fire as taking place in the eschaton, while the baptism of John in water appears to be ritual baptism. While baptism in water is purification only "in a mirror darkly," in the future fire baptism a person will become "totally pure of defilement." Cf. *Cels.* 5.15, with Ferguson (2006), 123–4; Edsman (1940).

[49] For Origen's view on the human as an inseparable composite of body and soul, see Edwards (2002), 87–122; Parnell (2009), 133–209.

[50] *Comm. Jo.* 6.33.166–7 (Preuschen 142–3).

[51] A fragment attributed to Origen (*Comm. Jo.* fr. 36 [Preuschen 547]) appears to answer this question. The body is purified in baptism as an instrument of the soul; the water purifying the person is sanctified through the invocation of the Trinity and therefore is not mere water. However, its authenticity is doubtful; see Heine (1986); Ferguson (2009), 413–14. For the need of "objects of sense (τὰ αἰσθητά)" in baptism and eucharist and opposition to those who believe only spiritual work is needed, see *Or.* 5.1.

Christian symbolism. Origen employs it for Jewish rituals, and he also calls the eucharist and baptism σύμβολον, though not a symbol *of* something.[52] A simple reading of the passage indicates that the invocation of the Trinity is only responsible for the attainment of the Holy Spirit, while prior purification is achieved through other means. Other passages, however, indicate that the invocation is responsible also for purification: "For the things made pure (*mundatur*) are made pure, not by a single invocation, nor by a second, but unless a third invocation is pronounced, no one is purified. For unless you were purified in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, you could not be pure."[53] In any case, even if immersion only expressed purification of the soul and did not perform it, Origen establishes a clear link between the corporeal and incorporeal elements of baptismal purification, a move which was not performed in earlier theories of baptism.

Origen was the first who discussed infant baptism. If forgiveness of sins is a central objective of baptism, why are non-sinful infants baptized? This question, to which Origen referred several times, was an opportunity for defining precisely what is being purified in baptism, and for deepening the link between the defilement of sexuality and the purification of baptism. I shall therefore proceed to describe Origen's view of sexuality and sexual sin.

## SIN AND SEXUALITY

Origen's position on marriage and sexuality has been characterized as "moderate encratism": one that does not totally condemn marriage, yet integrates key features of encratite ideology.[54] Although he owes much to second-century thought on sexuality, here too Origen is a great innovator. This is especially true regarding the purity aspects of sexuality.[55]

Origen's discussions of sexuality are extensive, and widely distributed among his voluminous writings. Two significant sites for the development of his thought are the *Homilies on Leviticus* 8, where he discusses the impurity of childbirth

[52] Eucharist: *Cels.* 8.57; *Hom. Jer.* 19.13; baptism: *Pasch.* 1.4. Parnell (2009), 203–8, argues that this usage is borrowed from pagan ritual theory, specifically theurgical theories. For uses of σύμβολον in early Christian literature and in Origen, see Crouzel (1961), 225–8; Lampe (1961), 1282. For a history of the term in antiquity, see Struck (2004). In *Cels.* 3.51 (Marcovich 193), Origen speaks of a certain group of catechumens as "those who have not yet received the sign that they have been purified (οὐδέπω τὸ σύμβολον τοῦ ἀποκεκαθάρθαι ἀνειληφότων)." However, it is not clear if this "sign" is baptism itself or a ritual differentiating between different levels of catechumens, such as exorcism. See Auf der Maur and Waldram (1981), 49–50; Saxer (1988), 151–2.

[53] *Hom. Lev.* 7.4.5 (Baehrens 384, trans. Barkley, 144). Cf. *Hom. Lev.* 8.11.10; *Hom. Jer.* 2.2; *Hom. Ex.* 11.7, cited above, p. 212.

[54] Gasparro (1995); Hunter (2007), 115.

[55] Crouzel (1963), esp. 39–65 and Gasparro (1984), 184–202 are essential here.

(Lev 12), and fragments 25–40 of his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, in which he discusses Paul's sexual ethics.[56] Even a cursory reading of these texts highlights the high prevalence of purity terms. This can be explained on two levels. First, Origen's discussions of sexuality are, generally speaking, built upon the biblical texts; in his role as an exegete, he adopts and adapts the purity terms common in both the Hebrew Bible and Paul's letters. Second, the purity language used by Origen reflects his understanding of sexuality as impurity.

As in many earlier authors, virginity on the one hand and πορνεία on the other are mapped unto a purity–impurity axis. Virginity is emphasized throughout Origen's writings: Both Jesus and Mary were virgins, "the first-fruit of the purity which consists in chastity (καθαρότητος τῆς ἐν ἁγνείᾳ ἀπαρχήν)."[57] After the martyrs, virgins and the continent are considered the best "sacrifices," since "it is the undefiled body that will chiefly seem to be a sacrifice that is living and holy and pleasing to God."[58] Sexual continence is instrumental for maintaining the Christian body as a temple of God.[59] The opposite pole is also clearly delineated: sexual sin defiles the soul;[60] "impurities (ἀκαθαρσίας)" are those acts which are "opposed to purity," born of "impure desires (ἀκάθαρτα ἐπιθυμίαι)": fornication, adultery, pederasty, etc.[61] Origen defines impurity as sexual sin, appealing to nature: "every sin of physical stimulation . . . not only concerning adulteries and corruptions of boys but also concerning all the others . . . has been given the general name impurities (ἀκαθαρσία) . . . [but only] in the case of actions contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν), not in the case of marriage."[62]

Beyond this traditional purity discourse Origen develops another dimension, the impurity of sexual relations in general. On the one hand, Origen emphasizes the permissibility of marriage, attacking encratite positions of "the followers of Marcion" as opposed to the unity of the good god.[63] On the other hand, he reiterates several times that marriage is a second best option, to be resorted to only when virginity is not possible: "God has allowed us to marry wives, because not everybody is capable of the superior condition which is to be entirely pure."[64] Throughout the discussion of marriage in his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, the term "purity" (καθαρ- or ἁγν- interchangeably) is reserved for virginity or for continent marriage; nevertheless, abstinence from sexual relations is sometimes described as "purer" or "purest" (καθαρώτερον,

[56] ed. Jenkins (1908), 353–72, 500–14.
[57] *Comm. Matt.* 10.17 (Klostermann 22).
[58] *Comm. Rom.* 9.1.7 (Brésard IV.70). Cf. *Cels.* 7.47–8, *Hom. Num.* 11.3.5.
[59] *Or.* 25.3; *Comm. Rom.* 1.18, 1.19.7; *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 16; *Cels.* 8.19; *Hom. Jos.* 5.6.
[60] *Hom. Gen.* 1.14.
[61] *Comm. Jo.* 20.22.177–8 (Preuschen 354); *Hom. Ps.* (Greek), Hom. V in Psalmum 77, 1 (Perrone 409).
[62] *Fr. Eph.* fr. 24 (Gregg 559, trans. Heine, 210); cf. *Fr. Eph.* fr. 37. Virginity is understood to equal incorruption also in *Hom. Gen.* 5.4, *Hom. Ex.* 13.6.
[63] *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 34 (Jenkins 503).
[64] *Cels.* 8.55 (Marcovich 572); *Comm. Rom.* 9.1.7; *Hom. Jer.* 20.4.1; *Comm. Matt.* 14.25.

καθαρότητα) rather than "pure," implying a gradation of levels of purity rather than an absolute distinction.[65] The blurred lines between defilement of sexual sin and of intercourse in general is apparent in Origen's comment that corruption (φθορά) is a term suited for describing sexual sin, since "uncorruption and corruption according to nature is abstaining from sexual intercourse—for a virgin is said to be corrupted, and also a young man is corrupted or uncorrupted."[66]

Does this mean that sex in marriage is impure? Can sexual impurity be present without sin? Origen's hesitation before arriving at such a conclusion is apparent from his apologetic language when discussing such issues, warnings that he is speaking of mysteries, and qualifying terminology.[67] Nevertheless, this was his conclusion. The impurity of non-sinful sex is discussed on two levels: its roots and background—the impurity of corporeality and the body; and its practical results—prohibition of praying or participating in the eucharist after sex.

In several places in his works, Origen speaks of the body and of conception and birth, the processes that create it, as inherently defiled. However, there are a number of ambiguities and inconsistencies between these texts. Sometimes impurity is conflated with sin, and at other times it is opposed to it. Furthermore, in some texts, the ultimate source of defilement is sexuality and the sexual act, while in others it is simply the fact of human embodiment.[68]

In the *Homilies on Luke* Origen explains that Jesus required purification after his birth even though there was no sin in his making, because "no man is clean of stain (*sorde*, ῥύπος); stain and sins do not mean the same thing… every soul that has been clothed with a human body has its own stain," even Jesus who took on a body for our salvation.[69] Likewise, infants are baptized although they did not sin: "through the mystery of baptism, the stains of birth are put aside."[70] These "stains" which baptism purifies are obviously universal, stem from the body, and are distinct from sin. In this text, sexuality is not mentioned at all as

[65] *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 28, 29, 33. Cf. *Hom. Gen.* 3.6.

[66] *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 32 (Jenkins 372).

[67] Apologetic: *Hom. Luc.* 14.3: "Perhaps I seem to speak rashly"; *Hom. Lev.* 8.3.1 (Baehrens 396): "I myself in such matters dare to say nothing. Yet, I think there are some hidden mysteries in these things"; *Hom. Lev.* 12.4.1 (Baehrens 460): "This passage of Scripture is most difficult to explain"; *Or.* 31.4: "lengthy consideration leads me to say"; *Hom. Num.* 6.3 (Baehrens 35): "Now I think, though I would not declare this absolutely"; *Hom. Num.* 23.3 (Baehrens 215): "I fear to say something … lest I seem to cause grief." Qualifying: *Hom. Lev.* 12.4.1 (Baehrens 460): "a certain contamination"; *Comm. Matt.* 17.35: "defilement of some sort (μολυσμῷ πως)"; "certain impurity (ἀκαθαρσίᾳ τινί)."

[68] For this question see Crouzel (1963), 60–6; Gasparro (1984), 189. For the general relationship between body, flesh, passions, and sin in Origen, see Blosser (2012), 47–59; Bagby (2014), with further bibliography in n.1.

[69] 14.3–4 (Rauer 97–8, trans. Lienhard, 57); the essential parts of this passage are also extant in the Greek fragments. For the defilement of Jesus' body, see also Jacobs (2013); *Cels.* 6.73; *Comm. Rom.* 3.8.4; *Hom. Lev.* 9.5.1; *Comm. Matt.* 15.23; *Hom. Ps.*, *Hom. II in Psalmum XV*, 20v–20r (Perrone 95–6).

[70] *Hom. Luc.* 14.5 (Rauer 98). And see n. 76 below.

the source of pollution. In the *Homilies on Leviticus*, however, Origen says sacrifice is required for infants as purification for parental defilement, either from the father's seed or from the mother's uterus. In this passage, Jesus is said to have remained pure, since his Father was divine and his mother uncontaminated.[71] Origen nowhere says in this passage that the act of conception is responsible for the defilement, though his claim that Mary was uncontaminated indicates this. Rather, the *materials* of which the fetus is composed are defiled and defiling. In both of these texts Origen differentiates between corporeal impurity and sin, and does not identify corporeal impurity with the sexual act. The defilement of birth is portrayed as a natural consequence, nearly devoid of moral significance.

An opposite position is found in other passages. In *Homilies on Leviticus* 8 Origen explains that a woman is defiled after giving birth, "as if she owes a propitiation and a purification for sin, because she furnishes the service of bearing a man into this world";[72] the baby itself is also defiled, for "every soul which is born in flesh is polluted by the filth of iniquity and sin."[73] Indeed, infant baptism demonstrates that infants require "forgiveness and indulgence."[74] Similarly in the *Commentary on Romans* (written around 246) Origen claims that Leviticus requires purification offerings for new-born babies and that infants are baptized owing to "sin's innate stain, which must be washed away through water and the spirit. Because of this as well, the body itself is called the body of sin…because the soul was fashioned into the body of sin."[75] In these passages the defilement present at birth is almost assimilated with sin.[76] The two positions taken in these passages appear irreconcilable, and it is safer to say that Origen did not arrive at a clear conclusion on the matter, or that he changed his mind over time.[77]

[71] *Hom Lev.* 12.4.1. The relationship between Mary's virginity and corporeal defilement is discussed by Crouzel (1962), 32–44; Hunter (2007), 184–6.

[72] *Hom Lev.* 8.3.1, (Baehrens 398, trans. Barkley, 155).

[73] *Hom. Lev.* 8.3.5 (Baehrens 398, trans. Barkley, 157). For a close reading of *Hom. Lev.* 8.1–4, see Fonrobert (2000), 198–203 and Rouwhorst (2000).

[74] *Hom. Lev.* 8.3.5.

[75] *Comm. Rom.* 5.9.13 (Brésard II.498; trans. Scheck, I.366). See also *Cels.* 7.50 (Marcovich 502): "a sacrifice for sin is to be offered even for new-born babes because they are not pure from sin."

[76] *Hom. Num.* 25.6 (Baehrens 241–2) presents a different angle on the pollution inherent in bodily life: "no one who goes forth from this life can be clean," because of the combat during life with evil and polluted forces; "Even if I am able to conquer the devil, even if I am able to reject the impure thoughts … I am necessarily polluted and defiled in the process." This text is untypical for Origen's thought: not only does pollution not equal sin, but it is actually the struggle against sin which pollutes. Cf. *Frg. Lam.* 23 (on Lam. 1:9), where Origen asks "if it is possible to be involved in some impurity without being responsible for it"; he appears to answer in the affirmative, though this is not totally clear.

[77] Many scholars understood Origen's position on sin at birth as deriving from his theory of the fall of the soul into the body due to its sins. See Raasch (1968), 39; Beatrice (1978), 212–21; Gasparro (1984), 185; Hällström (2010), 1000–4; for criticism, see Edwards (2002), 87–122 and Laporte (1995). However, none of the passages under discussion make any mention of it whatsoever, but only refer ambiguously to some "mystery."

Ritual defilement at birth, with little moral significance, would have been a very tidy way of explaining infant baptism as well as Jesus' requirement of purification, avoiding theological complications. However, defilement of the child at birth, as opposed to defilement of the mother, is only hinted at in Luke 2:2, and not in any other sources, Christian or Jewish; Origen probably picked this detail out because of its theological usefulness.[78] Considering the general lack of acceptance of unmediated ideas of ritual defilement by Christian writers in general and Origen in particular, it is not surprising that he could not retain the position of the *Homilies on Luke* without adding a moral dimension, as found in his later writings.

In the *Homilies on Luke* (and to a lesser extent in the *Homilies on Leviticus*) the emphasis is on the defilement of birth and generation, and not on the sexual act, which is only mentioned instrumentally. The simple fact of being in the body is that which defiles: "as long as we are placed in the flesh, we cannot be pure liquid unless the eighth day should come."[79] This is also apparent from the testimonia cited in these passages, all demonstrating that the day of birth is reason for lamentation, not celebration.[80] In the *Commentary on Romans*, however, Origen clearly ties birth defilement to the sexual act accompanied by lust; accordingly, in this text impurity is most strongly characterized as sin, of which Jesus is totally pure:

> all of us human beings who have been conceived from the seed of a man coming together with a woman, must of necessity employ that utterance in which David says, "in iniquities I have been conceived and in sins did my mother conceive me." He, however, who came to an immaculate body with no contact from a man . . . possessed in no respect whatsoever the contamination of sin, which is passed down to those who are conceived by the operation of lust.[81]

[78] Therefore, the claim of Ferguson (2006), 131 that Origen's innovation "is to extend the baptismal forgiveness of sins to ceremonial impurity, particularly that associated with childbirth," is problematic, since impurity of newborns is not mentioned in Leviticus or in subsequent Jewish or Christian exegesis. Harrington (2004), 62, find hints at the impurity of newborns in Qumran texts (and Thiessen [2012] adds *Jubilees*), but these, in my opinion, are only conjectures. Laporte (1997), 439 writes that "for Philo, the chief reason for circumcision is the removal of impurity of birth," citing *QG* 3.48. However, Philo only says there that one reason for circumcision (not the chief reason) is that entrance to the temple requires purity, and circumcision is similar to the Egyptians' shaving their hair before entering temples. The defilement according to Philo is clearly that of the foreskin, and not of birth, which is not mentioned. Moreoever, Laporte (1995), 193 erroneously claims that for Leviticus, circumcision removes "Levitical impurity." For circumcision and impurity, see Cohen (2005), 18–21; Clark (2011), 43–53.

[79] *Hom. Lev.* 8.4.1 (Baehrens 399, trans. Barkley, 159).

[80] *Hom. Lev.* 8.3; *Cels.* 7.50.

[81] *Comm. Rom.* 6.12.4 (Brésard III.206, trans. Scheck, II.49). Jesus lacking a body of sin because he was born without the involvement of "the seed of man or woman" appears in *Fr. Rom.* 45 (Ramsbotham *JTS* [1912] 14(1), p. 17), showing that Rufinus' translation is not responsible for this idea. However, lust is not mentioned in the fragment. Cf. *Cels.* 2.69 and *Hom. 15 Ps* 2.3.

The emphasis on sexual lust as the source for this impurity is pronounced also in texts in which Origen comments on passages mentioning "loins (ὀσφύς)." Ezekiel's heavenly man appeared as fire from his loins and downwards, but as electrum from his loins upwards: "everything which is in generation has need of purification from fire; everything which is in generation has need of punishment. But what is above the hips and has transcended generation, this is like the purest and most precious element in the world."[82] John the Baptist was celibate—as he had a "leather girdle round his loins" and "did not belong to the impure who, having been cast out of the camp because of the emission of semen, cannot dwell with the ark of the Lord."[83] Clearly, sexuality and corporeality are for Origen closely connected, even if in some texts one or the other side is emphasized.

Origen's hesitation to equate sexuality with a natural and inborn impurity is clear in light of his polemic against the putative opinions of Marcion, Basilides, and Valentinus and his emphasis on free will, on the one hand, and against the views on impurity he ascribes to the Jews, on the other. Despite this hesitation, it appears that this stance was highly attractive for him, both for its anchoring the condemnation of sexual activity and for providing an explanation for the essential impurity of the body. The image of the impurity of sin (rather than simply evil or sin as of itself) as a necessary companion to, or even cause of corporeality was especially useful as it retained some wiggle room between sin and its effects, or between human free will and the natural and unchosen human situation. This usefulness is indeed at the very basis of the function of impurity in all cultures and religions as a way to circumscribe and separate the sacred from human corporeality without one overcoming the other. In other words, Origen is here opening a way for the return to a truce type of impurity, in which impurity remains in the world and is not eradicated, at least until the eschaton. It is unsurprising that this return is hesitant in light of the pervasive battle imagery of impurity in early Christian writings. While for Paul and many second-century writers the impurity of sin was only present outside of the community and its incursions into the community could and should be fought, Origen recognizes that impurity is necessarily present, even in the midst of the baptized community, and even when no sin was committed.

Origen twice ties the status of sexuality to Adam and Eve's sin. In one case, he argues that although humans naturally have sexual facilities, they were not created to be sexual beings but rather to be the temple of God.[84] Proof for this is found in that Adam and Eve had sex only after their sin and expulsion from

[82] *Hom. Jer.* 11.5 (Klostermann 83, trans. Smith, 107). See also *Hom Ez.* 1.3.2; *Sel. Ezech., PG* 13.768.

[83] *Fr. Eph.* fr. 34 (Gregg 573; trans. Heine, 263); *Pasch.* 35. For a similar interpretation of the high priest's girdle and breeches as pertaining to Jesus' celibacy, see *Hom. Lev.* 9.2.4.

[84] *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 29.

Eden. Since this is a known encratite position,[85] he hastens to add that it does not preclude marriage but only indicates that marriage is inferior to "chastity and purity." In the other, explaining the Pauline expression "body of sin," he says that "our body is the body of sin, for it is not written that Adam knew his wife Eve and became father of Cain until after the sin."[86] This position appears to entail that Adam and Eve were created as asexual beings and only later became sexual, though Origen nowhere says this explicitly.[87] The primeval roots of the impurity of sexuality, although expressed in these two texts quite clearly, are far from central for Origen's thought; it is rather sexuality as the origin for birth and corporeal existence that is emphasized.

Origen refers several times to restrictions on eucharist participation, characterizing the eucharist clearly as a sacred ritual which required prior preparation and purification. Echoing Paul, he claims that whoever partakes of the eucharist when defiled by sin and without examining themselves will be punished by various physical and spiritual ailments: "You do not receive the sacrament of the Lord's body with a soul contaminated and polluted by sins."[88] Origen reads the preparations required of the priests in Leviticus before entering the holy place as relating to the holiness of the soul required for receiving the eucharist, as well as prayer or the word of God.[89] In a passage from the *Commentary on Matthew* in which Origen attempts to homogenize a number of verses dealing with food,[90] the pollution which results from eating idol sacrifices with a defiled and unbelieving conscience is compared to the sanctification which results from eating the eucharist with a pure conscience.[91] In both cases, says Origen, it is not the material food which delivers the spiritual result, but the eater's conscience; in the case of the eucharist, the conscience interacts with the prayer said over the bread to produce sanctification.[92] The same idea is found in the *Contra Celsum*: after Origen denies demons and sacrifice any role in true worship, he explains that the alternative is to

> Give thanks to the Creator of the universe and eat the loaves that are presented with thanksgiving and prayer over the gifts, so that by the prayer they become a

[85] See above, pp. 175–6.

[86] *Comm. Rom.* 5.9.12 (Brésard II.496, trans. Scheck, I.366). For Adam in Origen's writings, see Bammel (1989).

[87] Gasparro (1984), 198–202 attempts to reconstruct an Origenist three-stage fall into the body and sexuality in the story of Genesis, on the basis of fourth- and fifth-century evidence and second-century precedents.

[88] *Hom. Lev.* 13.5.4–5 (Baehrens 477, trans. Barkley, 243); cf. *Hom. Ps.* (Latin) 2.6; *Sel. Jer.* 29.21; *Comm. Matt.* 10.25.

[89] *Hom. Lev.* 9.1.3, 13.5.4; *Hom. Ex.* 13.3.

[90] *Comm. Matt.* 15.11. The key verses are Matt 15:11, 17; Rom 14:23; 1 Cor 8:8, 11:30; 1 Tim 4:5.

[91] The argument is an expanded version of that appearing in Irenaeus, p. 142 above.

[92] The parallel for prayer in the case of the idol food would presumably be pagan prayer or demons, but Origen does not mention them in this passage, indicating that it is only the conscience which plays a role in defilement from food.

certain holy body (σῶμα γενομένους…ἅγιόν τι) which sanctifies those (ἁγιάζον) who partake of it with a pure (ὑγιοῦς προθέσεως) intention.[93]

This must be so, as otherwise the eucharist would sanctify even the unworthy, which is ruled out by 1 Corinthians 11:28. This verse is thus used by Origen to locate the sanctifying force in the person instead of the food, eschewing what he characterizes as a naïvely materialist "Jewish" view. Although Origen does not draw the full conclusions from his comparison, its logic leads us to understand that the conscience of the unworthy person partaking of the eucharist is as defiled as that of the one who eats idol sacrifices in a state of sinful disbelief, producing a similar spiritual result.

Several times throughout his works Origen reads Paul's instructions of 1 Corinthians 7:5 as concerning the incompatibility of sexual intercourse and prayer, and develops a similar conception regarding the eucharist based upon the Pauline injunctions in 1 Cor 11:28–34 and Old Testament precedents.[94] In his commentary to 1 Cor 7:5, Origen writes unequivocally that prayer by a couple who have had intercourse is impure (μὴ καθαρᾶς), even if intercourse itself is permitted, since "it is impossible to pray as is ought and to provide for the duties of marriage." For support, he argues that even "the Greeks purify themselves (ἁγνεύουσι) for the sake of their idols…Moses, too, purifies (ἁγνίζει) the people and says, 'Do not go near a woman for three days,' so that their purified state might enable them to become hearers of God."[95] Origen then applies the same logic to the eucharist, this time using the example of the sexual abstinence David required of his men before eating holy bread.[96] In this fragment, Origen applies pagan and biblical evidence without any allegory or apologetic, understanding temporary sexual abstinence as a universal human preparation for sacred activities, whether prayer, fasting, revelation, eating holy bread, or even pagan idols. This incompatibility between sex and holiness accords with Origen's opinion that the Holy Spirit cannot be present during sexual activity, even if performed for the sake of lawful procreation by a prophet.[97] Therefore, "the offering of perpetual sacrifice [= prayer] belongs to that one alone who has

[93] *Cels.* 8.33 (Marcovich 549; trans. Chadwick, 476). See Parnell (2009), 201–2.

[94] For the relationship between sexuality and prayer in Origen's thought, see Perrone (2011), 492–9.

[95] *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 34 (Jenkins 502, trans. Kovacs [2005], 108). In *Hom. Ex.* 11.7 Origen links Moses' injunction not with temporary abstinence but with the ideal of "it is well for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor 7:1), which he attributes to Paul himself. For Origen's exegesis of 1 Cor 7:5, see also *Or.* 31, *Comm. Matt.* 14.2, *Hom. Num.* 23.3; Crouzel (1963), 54–7; Clark (1999), 278–80; Hunter (2007), 125–7; Perrone (2011), 172–6.

[96] David's pure reception of the eucharist is mentioned also in *Hom. Ez.* 9.5.

[97] *Hom. Num.* 6.3.7. Marriage, therefore, cannot be a "spiritual gift," since it includes intercourse (*Comm. Rom.*, fr. 3); and since those who have intercourse are in "a certain impurity" and cannot pray, marriage cannot feature in the future age (*Comm. Matt.* 17.35 [Klostermann 699]).

pledged himself to perpetual and continual chastity (*qui indesinenti et perpetuae se devoverit castitati*)."[98]

In *On Prayer*, impurity is hesitantly extended even to the place where sexual activity occurs, which is seen as unsuitable for prayer.[99] In another passage in the same text, however, the relationship between prayer and sex arising from 1 Cor 7:5 is seen quite differently, reminiscent of Clement of Alexandria: "[prayer] 'as we ought' is hindered unless in performance of the ineffable mysteries of marriage due regard is paid to gravity, infrequence and absence of passion."[100] Here it is not sex itself that is the problem, but the lack of restraint accompanying it; accordingly impurity language is absent. In the commentary on 1 Corinthians, too, marriage "kept to a limit" is the "scent of a charism" (*Πνέει χαρίσματος ὁ γάμος*).[101] However, this position appears the less dominant one in Origen's writing.

The eucharist is equated to the Passover sacrifice, which requires "girding of loins": "Scripture teaches us to bind up the bodily source of seed and to repress inclinations to sexual relations when we partake of the flesh of Christ…the married man who eats the Passover will also gird his loins."[102] Sexual purity is required especially of church officials: the priest who enters the sanctuary and offers the eucharist after intercourse "despite his impurity (*ἀκαθαρσίαν*)… profanes (*βεβηλοῖ*) the sanctuary and creates confusion (*φυρμόν*)."[103]

Origen categorically prohibits intercourse during menstruation: "one who has intercourse with a woman in the time of her period is considered highly culpable."[104] As opposed to Clement, however, he does not appeal to procreationist ideology but to the prohibition of Ezekiel (18:6). It is instructive that in this issue as well as those of the sexual purity required for prayer and eucharist, Origen rarely appeals directly to the biblical texts which concern impurity of genital emissions (Lev 15), or sexual prohibitions (Lev 18), even when these texts would have supported his position. He prefers to turn to the actions of the patriarchs and prophets, to the words of the prophets and to such ambiguous expressions as "girding of loins," perhaps so as not to seem as if he is obligated to laws of Leviticus.

[98] *Hom. Num.* 23.3.2 (Baehrens 215). In both these texts, Origen starts by speaking of sin as proscribing connection with the Holy Spirit or prayer, and then suggests that the same is true regarding sexual impurity. For perpetual prayer, see 1 Thess 5:17.

[99] *Or.* 31.4.

[100] *Or.* 2.2 (Koetschau, 300; trans. Oulton and Chadwick, 241). Another comment similar to Clement's restrictions on married sex is found in *Hom. Luc.* 6.1 (Rauer 34–5): "Even those who are joined in marriage do not consider every season free for intercourse … if the husband and wife are both aged, it is a disgraceful thing for them to yield to lust and turn to mating."

[101] *Fr. 1 Cor.* 34; Perrone (2011), 496.

[102] *Pasch.* 35.30–37.2 (Witte 128, trans. Daly, 47).

[103] *Sel. Ezech.* 7.22, *PG* 13.793. For other purity requirements for the eucharist according to Origen, see Buchinger (2007), 215, and texts cited there.

[104] *Fr. 1 Cor.* fr. 34 (Jenkins 502); *Sel. Ezech.* 18.6, *PG* 13.816. For Clement, see above, pp. 176–7.

Though not written by Origen, a set of questions and answers written by Dionysius of Alexandria, a pupil of Origen and bishop of the city in the middle of the third century, exemplifies this attitude towards sexual impurity.[105] Dionysius refers to the following questions: can women enter the church and participate in the eucharist while menstruating? And what about a married couple after sexual relations, and men after seminal emissions?[106] This is the earliest Christian text foregrounding these questions, a sign of the institutionalization of worship in this period, the sacralization of places dedicated to worship and the rise of the eucharist as a sacred object.[107] When a conception of sacredness residing in physical objects and spaces arose, it was soon expressed through attitudes towards sexuality, and ritual purity was invoked.

Regarding menstruation, Dionysius answers as follows:

> Concerning women in their menstrual separation (ἐν ἀφέδρῳ), whether it is right for them in such a condition to enter the house of God, I think it unnecessary even to inquire. For I think that they, being faithful and pious, would not dare in such a condition either to approach the holy table or to touch the body and blood of Christ. For even the woman who had the twelve-year discharge and was eager for a cure touched not him but only his fringe. It is unobjectionable to pray in any state… but he who is not completely pure (καθαρός) in both soul and body shall be prevented from approaching the holy and the holy of holies.

The impurity of menstruation, and the relevance of this impurity for approaching the eucharist or the holy table, is self-evident; what is more, Dionysius believes that normative Christian women would also think it self-evident. Even if he is overstating his case, the belief in the impurity of menstruation must have been widespread. Body and soul are put on a similar level, and purity of both is required for approaching the holy.

Prayer, as opposed to the eucharist, is "unobjectionable" even in a state of impurity. This exemption is difficult to reconcile with Dionysius' next answer (canon 3), which states that "persons who are self-sufficient and married ought to be judges of themselves," citing 1 Corinthians 7:5, a verse that clearly does perceive prayer as incompatible to some degree with sexual relations.[108]

[105] For Dionysius' relationship with Origen, see Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.29–41.

[106] Dionysius of Alexandria, *Letter to Basilides* 2 (P. Joannou, ed. and trans. *Discipline générale antique*, Vol. 2: *Les canons des pères grecs*. Grottaferrata: Tipografia Italo-Orientale S. Nilo, 1963), 12; trans. *ANF* VI.94–6. Discussions of this text are found in Cohen (1991); Brakke (1995), 433–4; Fonrobert (2000), 196–7; Synek (2001).

[107] For sacred space in early Christianity see Sotinel (2005); Kilde (2008), 13–38. For the sacralization of the eucharist see Caseau (2009).

[108] Synek (2001) believes this answer referred to a question about the general permissibility of sexual relations during menstruation; however, I see no specific reason that such a prohibition, which very rarely appears even in later Christian sources, is meant here. The question of prayer after sexual relations is much better attested, and is of course the subject of the Pauline verse cited. Furthermore, the expression "judges of themselves" is probably a reference to 1 Cor 11:29–30, indicating that Dionysius' answer refers to self-discernment regarding the eucharist.

Dionysius probably meant to say that since discretion is given to married couples in the question of prayer and sex, it should also be given them in the case of the eucharist. The distinction between prayer and eucharist indicates that Dionysius thought impurity is more potent as regards physical sacred things than spiritual things, or, perhaps, that prayer was considered less sacred, and therefore less endangered by impurity.

Shaye Cohen remarks that Dionysius' answer appears to hearken back to Leviticus 15; Charlotte Fonrobert, however, argues that Leviticus is not mentioned and that biblical laws are not closely followed.[109] Since menstruation rarely appears as an impurity in Greco-Roman culture,[110] and almost all prior and contemporary occurrences of this usage of the term (ἀφέδρος) are based upon the Septuagint, I find Cohen's position more tenable.

The third question concerns seminal emissions; here too, Dionysius says that "they should be guided by their own conscience" and "decide for themselves, whether they have any doubt about this matter or not, as also in the case of foods, 'he that has any doubt is damned if he eat.' " The juxtaposition of the two Pauline passages (1 Cor 7:5 and Rom 14:23) yields a general rule of thumb regarding purity issues, according to which impurity only influences one who believes in it. Dionysius, however, applies the rule to men only, giving a strong gender bias to the impurity of genital emissions; the defilement of menstruation was too strong for attenuation by Pauline ambiguity. Alternatively, perhaps Dionysius thought that all women, as "delicate" in the terms of Romans 14, believed menstruation to be impure.

Origen is the only Christian writer from the first three centuries who created a nuanced ontology of sexual defilement. For Origen, defilement, and in this case sexual defilement, is a term that connects several dimensions of thought and practice: cosmology, anthropology, ethics, and ritual. This may also be the reason that his writings are not always totally consistent: sexual defilement as a cosmological/anthropological term is not always compatible with its implications for ritual. This diversity in the meaning of defilement is also a result of the different sources Origen is using: although he clearly makes use of ideas found in anti-marriage authors discussed earlier, he integrates them into a setting in which marriage is allowed. This integration of radical and less radical strands of thought may explain why impurity attained such a central place in his sexual ethic.

For Origen, sexuality is a necessary evil in the present world, and this contradiction can be put to rest, even if not solved, by calling it impure. Purity and defilement are structures of thought which respond to the need to combine an anti-sexual attitude with a reality in which believers are married and will continue marrying for the foreseeable future. It is possible to contain the defilement of sexuality as long as it does not invade the sphere of the holy—that of

[109] Cohen (1991), 288–9; Fonrobert (2000), 296 n. 84. [110] See above, p. 25.

prayer, the eucharist, the church, and its officials. This affirmation of the value of ritual purity and defilement must also reflect a growing institutionalization of Christianity, the erection of structures which are seen as containing inside them, whether physically or metaphorically, a sacredness which is not found outside. Rituals are required to maintain the borders of these institutions.

## SUMMARY

Origen's interest in purity concepts is not only a result of the biblical basis of his writing, though this doubtless had a significant impact. Origen's innovative manipulation of the biblical purity concepts is a product of a number of simultaneous polemical motivations, against the (supposed) "literal" Jewish interpretation, "gnostic" determinism, and pagan criticism of Christian texts, morality, ritual, and theology. Origen used these competitors and detractors as foils for the creation of conceptions of impurity which could serve Christianity's emerging ritual and social structures. These conceptions were hardly unitary, but rather changed according to need and text. Nevertheless, they have a common ground in that impurity is neither totally symbolic and subjective, nor totally natural and objective, but rather designated a middle ground.

Purity concepts were so useful because they mirrored and expressed ambiguity: persons could be called pure or impure even if they were not responsible for any morally valenced action. This role of circumventing sin can be seen most explicitly in the discussion of infant baptism, where the infant is impure even without sin, but also in the discussion of sex, where the "corruption" of a virgin is at least partly simply a reflection of her physical status. In the case of food, too, food offered to idols is defiled even for one who did not participate in worship, and ideas of impurity allow this extension of a negative status beyond its originator.

Origen continues to use some of the same terminology, such as burning of the material by divine fire, but his emphasis is on other aspects, such as prior preparation through repentance. His major innovation is of baptism as a purification of some kind of bodily defilement, inherent in all human beings due to their corporeality, which is evil even if not sinful; its origin may be in sexuality, though Origen is not clear on this point. With this concept Origen comes close to the idea present in the *Pseudo-Clementines* that baptism purifies lust and replaces the generation of concupiscence with a pure generation of water. This defilement is clearly not the defilement resulting directly and physically from sexual relations or from menstruation, which requires repeated purification; but it is similar to it in its connection with sexuality and in its inherence in the human body, without requiring moral action. This similarity is used also by Clement of Alexandria and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* to demonstrate that

repeated washings for purification, associated with Judaism, are superfluous for the baptized.

Demons—ambivalent beings as regarding corporeality and sin—are described as carriers of impurity. This idea is constructed most forcefully as regards food, building both on the scriptural basis of idol-worship as demon-worship and on developing contemporary conceptions of the place of demons as intermediaries in sacrificial rituals. The centrality of demons in Origen's thought on purity can be compared to their centrality in the contemporary *Pseudo-Clementines* and the *Didascalia*. The Jewish-Christian sources make wide use of demonology also in explaining baptism and sexual impurity, while Origen does not give them a significant place in his baptismal theory. Nevertheless, this convergence shows the rising importance of demons, from their place in ethical theories of the second century (Valentinus, *Shepherd of Hermas*) to development in ritual theories of the third century.

Origen introduces some aspects of a "truce" relationship between purity and impurity into Christian thought and practice. Earlier authors such as the *Apocryphal Acts* did not differentiate between impurity and sin, meaning that impurity became simply a term for evil, albeit of a specific type. This meant that it could never be accommodated, only eradicated. For Origen, however, impurity was the product or result of sin. It could therefore be managed as an independent entity, through rituals and asceticism, even when these do not uproot sin itself. Thus the association of impurity with sin, which became imperative in Christian writing and thought, did not prevent the development of impurity as an independent concept, and purification as an independent practice.

# 10

# General Conclusions

This study has demonstrated the importance of discourses of purity and defilement for the formation of identities and for understanding the roles of community, ritual, body, and soul among early Christian writers. Far from becoming suddenly irrelevant with Paul or the gospel narratives in the first century, purity—in practice and in speech—was continuously a focus of attention, challenged, negotiated, and redefined by the authors of the second and third centuries. This continuing interest reflected the gradual process of the differentiation of Christian purity discourse from that of Jews and pagans, in parallel with the creation of a differentiated Christian culture more generally. In three major areas of ritual and practice—food, sex, and baptism—purity discourse was instrumental in constructing early Christian identity vis-à-vis Jews and pagans, in negotiating the place of the body in Christian practice and thought, and in developing a new ethic out of existing traditions. Thus, the purity discourse which emerged by the middle of the third century in Origen's writings was already a uniquely Christian amalgam of Jewish, Greek, and Roman traditions and of the intense reactions to them by the various Christian communities and factions during the second century. Purity discourse bore much of the brunt of this creative activity, caught as it was in the tension between the continuing use of traditional language and concepts of sacredness, purity, and defilement (whether biblical or pagan) and radically new ideas and practices of salvation for all through the human body and a community requiring conversion and individual consent.

## THE MOTIVATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN PURITY DISCOURSE

Two broad motivations, at some tension with each other, drove the creation of Christian purity discourses. The first was a substantive motivation: the creation and maintenance of theories of human nature and ritual coherent with the theological principles of the new religious movement coalescing in this period,

and the integration of purity traditions and concepts into these worldviews and theories. Christian writers were members of insular communities, who perceived themselves as bastions of light in a dark world. Conceptualizing their own conversion and that of the other community members from dark to light, from outsiders to insiders, was a critical part of their self-identity. No less important was creating and justifying the hierarchies of the community itself, both spiritually and socially. These problems were approached by conceptualizing what sin, especially sexual sin, does to a person and to the community and how it can be removed. Images of purity and defilement, providing a model for the interaction of individual body and the community, were central concepts in these conceptualizations.

The second motivation was polemical: construction of Christian identity by laying claim to true purity while marking the purity practices and beliefs of others (Jews, pagans, or "heretics") as false. For this motivation, the main thrust of purity discourse was not so much creating new hierarchies or concepts, but rather denying the validity of traditional concepts.

In some areas of purity discourse one motivation took precedence over the other. Thus, concerning food and death, polemical interests serving to buttress Christian identity were much more central, while concerning sexuality and baptism, questions of human nature, theology, and ritual theory are paramount. This difference is rooted and reflected in the sources of the language used in each of these areas. Issues of food purity were traditionally used by Second Temple Jewish groups to define themselves against each other; the Christian movement took this instrument to an extreme. With the expansion of the movement into Greco-Roman society, it connected with the common Greco-Roman perception of Jewish food laws as xenophobic and ritualistic. This move probably gained support due to the attempts of some Christian groups to prove themselves superior to others through sexual and dietary asceticism, triggering a counter-move of moderation, in which such practices were considered heretical. The dietary choices of the Jewish food laws were cast as an external and arbitrary mode of purity, as opposed to purity of mind, body, and flesh through sexual choice, and to some extent fasting, which was cast as internal; this dichotomy was opposed to the common philosophical discourse in which dietary and sexual choices were both seen as similarly relevant to individual purity. While sexual abstinence and fasting were common ascetic endeavors in the Greco-Roman world and could therefore relatively easily be co-opted for the Christian project, the Jewish food laws, seemingly arbitrarily marking specific species as impure, were not. As a result, in food issues authors built on the Gospels and on Paul and used them against the purity concepts of the biblical dietary laws. The situation was similar concerning questions of death impurity.

In sexual issues, which were not focused on anti-Jewish polemics but on substantive questions, the opposite was the case: the sexual sin–impurity tradition,

originating in the Hebrew Bible and amplified in Second Temple writings, was taken up in Paul and second-century writers. Although there were certainly expansions and shifts in the meaning of the concepts, there is continuity of language. This allowed Christian sexual impurity language to reverberate more freely with biblical allusions. In texts discussing baptism, there is little sense of either break or continuity with the Hebrew Bible. Although historically Jewish washings were probably the context for John's baptisms, early Christian authors ignored this. Rather, baptismal purification language, with its emphasis on knowledge and personal change, drew from biblical penitential images and from Platonic images of self-purification. The language used was also dependent on author. This can be seen especially when comparing Origen to previous writers. In the *Dialogue*, Justin quotes biblical testimonia extensively, but his own purity language is frequently not biblical, and Clement of Alexandria speaks much more of moderation than of purification, hardly using biblical language directly to speak of purity. Origen's writing, on the other hand, is always interwoven with biblical impurity language (both from the Old and the New Testaments), especially in his exegetical and homiletical works, the vast majority of his extant oeuvre. This lends a very different character to his writing, making purity much more prominent.

Determining whether polemical or substantive motivations are driving the discussion is highly significant. Thus, for example, the description of the relationship between the interior, moral aspects of the person and the exterior bodily aspects is dependent upon the motivation. Concerning food, where the polemical motivation drove the discussion, the central focus of the discourse was of distinction between inner and outer purity. Food purity was cast as external and irrelevant for Christians, for whom only internal purity was relevant, as opposed to Jews, who were interested only in external purity. When we turn to sexual issues, where the discussion is not focused on polemic, authors emphasized not the divide between internal and external, but rather how both are integrated in Christian sexual purity.

## THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF CHRISTIAN PURITY DISCOURSE

I now turn to a more detailed examination of these motivations, starting with the substantive. What were the theories on human nature and on ritual at the basis of Christian purity discourse?

The Christian perception of purity was typically that of a battle, in which the pure was totally opposed to the defiled, with no possibility of co-existence. The pure and defiled were not circumscribed to certain clearly defined spheres regulating temporary access to the sacred as in truce conceptions, but were

rather overarching categories, relevant in every time and place. Management of purity and defilement required relating to both ritual and bodily practice, as well as the person's agency, interior faculties, and relationship with supernatural entities. Thus, Christian perceptions of purity and defilement expressly concerned both body and soul, maintaining an integrated ethics of the person as a whole, and yet differentiating between these aspects of the person.

It is impossible to reconstruct a clear trajectory of development of theological and anthropological purity theory through the first three centuries CE: the diversity of authors, interests, and influences does not allow this, and many themes appear in the early second century only to disappear and resurface a century later. Rather than reconstruct a trajectory, we may compare the earliest and the latest authors discussed in the book: early second-century texts with the writings of Origen. In many second-century authors, purity language was unsystematic and ambiguous, frequently used ad hoc to strengthen points. At times it is used in a more technical and defined fashion, but only in one area, e.g., sex in *Hermas* or the Apocryphal Acts, baptism in the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*. Only with Origen is there an attempt to transform these traditions on purity into a theological concept that can be generalized across different areas, so that the logic of purification which appears in food issues would cohere with that found in baptism and sex, and with Origen's other principles of theology, exegesis, and human nature.

The theological utility of purity concepts is clearest in Origen's writings. However, the continued use of purity concepts in early Christian writing in general can be ascribed also to internal social-religious reasons. From the second century onwards, the church developed set rituals and hierarchies. The integration of these hierarchies and rituals into an eschatological worldview in which good and evil were in constant battle required a certain "routinization of charisma," a process which was doubtless ongoing throughout the first centuries. Purity concepts were one of the best instruments available to encode this routinization, and yet maintain the sense of duality and battle. This can best be seen in the sexual realm: most of the texts of the second and third centuries which speak of sex as polluted and of sexual abstinence as the purest option do not clearly support total celibacy for all Christians, but only for a minority. A sliding scale of sexual purity allowed them to clearly mark the moral value of different sex practices, but still retain a legitimate space for married Christians. These texts are playing in the space between battle and truce perceptions of purity: sexual pollution is inherently evil, but it can nevertheless be lived with, as long as it is marked as such. Thus on both the theological and the practical level, the substantive aspect of purity discourse offered welcome slippage, allowing a hierarchy of practice not directly linked to that of sin.

The purity discourses of both pagan and Jewish religions were themselves highly complex and in continuous flux. As seen in the first chapter, several systems were at play, including tolerated or temporary impurities, prohibited

or sin impurity, and ascetic purity. Purity discourses may be better described as webs of allusions rather than as systems, even if some texts sought to systemize them. Therefore Christian purity discourse (itself multiform) cannot be seen as a reaction or adoption of any one purity system. Rather, inasmuch as Christian purity discourse related to the discourses of other religions, it selected (consciously or not) certain elements to be attacked and rejected, or, alternatively, adopted and integrated.

The process of selection differed significantly in each of the areas examined. As concerns pagan purity discourse on defilement or purity of food and death, there is hardly any adoption or rejection (though it is reasonable to assume significant continuity in terms of purity *practice*, not discussed in the texts). Concerning sexuality and baptism there is more awareness of continuity: both the *Pseudo-Clementines* and Origen argue for the importance of sexual purity from the consensus on it in all religious systems, and Justin is aware of the similarities between pagan washing rituals and baptism, though for him this is a problem rather than an asset. The main borrowing of purity discourse from Greco-Roman religions concerned Platonic conceptions of human nature through which asceticism was explained. Thus, the bifurcation of body and soul and the purification of the latter from the former was in the background of descriptions of baptism as purificatory enlightenment and of sexual asceticism as freeing the soul from the strictures of the body. And yet, in both baptism and sexuality, a simple dualism does not explain purification since for many texts not only the soul but also the body was purified or defiled. This problem of religious action as purifying the soul or the person as a whole is inherent in the Platonic tradition, and is found also in second- and third-century pagan Neoplatonists.

## CHRISTIAN PURITY DISCOURSE AS A RESPONSE TO JEWISH PURITY DISCOURSE

The relationship with Jewish purity discourses was more explicit. Most Christian purity discourse on baptism, food, and death from the second century on was based on constructing a "true" purity practice of Christians, opposed to a "false" Jewish one; the former is interior, intentional, and thus involves the essence of the person as an agent, while the latter is external, automatic, and the person is only instrumental. Although a distinction between moral/spiritual and ritual/bodily purity for polemical purposes was found in Jewish, Greek, and Latin literature, it is only with early Christianity that this distinction became a cornerstone of purity discourse. All purity laws and practices were seen through the lens of the battle perception of purity, and from this viewpoint it was easy to attack Jewish practices as irrelevant, insufficiently invested in defeating evil.

This construction was not an accurate reflection of reality, first because Jews had various conceptions of impurity as concerning sin or the interior of the person, but also because Christians, too, believed in certain dimensions of defilement which could not be clearly linked to sin, or which were exterior rather than internal. Nevertheless, it is true that in Christianity defilement as an aspect of sin was dominant, while in Judaism we find various types of defilement, some linked to sin and some not.

Despite this polemical construction of an opposition between Jewish and Christian purity conceptions, dimensions of impurity in Judaism which were linked to sin, and therefore more compatible with the battle perception, were integrated into Christian discourse. This is seen especially in sexual defilement and to a lesser extent in baptism. In these cases, the defilement of sin, which in the Hebrew Bible and in Second Temple period literature was considered non-purifiable (for the most part) or purifiable only by sacrifice (in specific cases), received a new ritual formulation. In the case of baptism, prophetic calls for repentance, expressed through images of washing in water, were joined to actual washings for purification from temporary defilements, to create a new ritual of initiation and purification from sin. In the case of sexual relations, sexual sin was reconceptualized as a defilement of the person of the sinner (both body and soul). More radically, marital sexual relations were redefined by many Christians as a defilement of the person, with the body at the focus of this defilement. This focus on the body as the source and expression of defilement was an expression of the rise of ascetic purity, in which defilement was no longer a temporary issue (in the case of tolerated defilements) or an unusual one (in the case of prohibited defilements), but a perennial question, accompanying all embodied souls in search for salvation. In this framework, new types of purificatory rituals were called for: rituals which perpetually divided a select group from the rest of humanity through personal transformation, rather than rituals which allowed occasional and relatively non-committal meetings with the divine. The roots for this transformation can be seen already in Second Temple period writings, where the purity of Israel as a select group is considered to be expressed ritually in the laws of food or sex.

The development of Christian purity discourse of the second and third centuries may be compared also with contemporary rabbinic discourse. Here it is difficult to make a case for borrowing or rejection, and the comparison is rather of structural similarities and differences. Both the Christian writers and the Rabbis were attempting to formulate a purity discourse for their respective communities in the Roman Empire, and for both the Hebrew Bible had a central role in its development. The different starting points of the two are obvious: for the Rabbis, the biblical impurity systems were valid and compulsory, and at least those parts which were relevant without a temple still to be practiced. For the Christian writers they were generally not valid (with the exception of the defilement of genital emissions). Nevertheless, the recent book by Mira Balberg

(2014), which links rabbinic purity discourse as found in the Mishna to Greco-Roman ideologies of self-control and self-knowledge, provides a starting point for thinking also of similarities (see above p. 57).

As Balberg herself notes, the innovative rabbinic focus on the consciousness of the subject in the transmission of impurity is paralleled by Paul's subjectivization of impurity. This is even more developed in Clement's and Origen's ideas of how impurity of food offered to idols is dependent on the subject's consciousness. However, this parallel also highlights the difference: for Origen, impurity (of this kind at least) is created only by conscious beings; for the Rabbis, impurity is created by natural, non-conscious bodily events.

A related claim of Balberg's is that the Rabbis refocus purity discourse, from the purity rules themselves to the person who maintains them, i.e., to the formation of the subject. In this respect, too, there is a parallel with the asceticization of Christian purity discourse. Although some Christian authors prefer to use Greco-Roman philosophical language of moderation to describe self-attention, self-formation, and social order, I have documented here the many second- and third-century writers who use purity discourse originating from the sphere of radical sexual renunciation. While in the Jewish case purity discourse moves from the dominant ritual sphere to that of the individual psyche, in the Christian case it comes from the sphere of the defilement of sin, bringing with it its radicalism and dualism, which is generally lacking in the Jewish parallel.

Issues of community borders are also comparable. For Balberg, the Rabbis oversee a move from a focus on the values inside the purity system (i.e., whether a thing or person is pure or not) to a focus on the question of participation in the system in the first place (i.e., whether a thing or person can become pure/impure or not). For the Rabbis, gentiles—like non-artificial objects—do not participate in the system, and they cannot become either pure or impure. The Rabbis are interested in circumscribing the significance of the purity system to a select group only. The Christians draw the line differently, making a universal claim: all humans can either become defiled or be purified, and demons serve to widen this even further.

## DEMONS AND IMPURITY

In many of the texts surveyed, demons and impurity are closely linked. Though this link has roots in both Jewish Second Temple literature and Greco-Roman culture, its centrality and explicitness is unique to early Christian thought. In earlier thought demons generally acted independently of the human psyche; here, they were transformed into agents of pollution, intruders into the essentially positive or neutral human psyche. One reason for this development was

the transformation of the pagan gods, with their pollution inherited from Jewish literature, into demons. For the more systematic thinkers, however, demons were useful as pollutants because they could cross and blur the boundaries of cosmological and human hierarchies, yet leave the system intact without undermining the primacy of human subjectivity as the source of moral value; a similar process occurred among pagan Neoplatonic thinkers.

## BROADER CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study have wider implications, beyond the question of the development of purity concepts. First, in the discussion of the place of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism and Greco-Roman religions, purity has typically been an area which exemplified the change Christianity wrought: from ritual to moral, from external to internal. Our analysis demonstrates that this perception of a break, though not unfounded, has been much amplified by the interests of Christian polemics, and finds significant threads of continuity between ancient purity conceptions and those of Christianity. As in many other areas, so too concerning purity issues Christian writers did not discard the concepts of ancient religions, but adapted them to suit their new worldview. Purity conceptions and practices serve universal social-religious needs: the creation and maintenance of hierarchy and identity by a delineation of the place of the sacred. These needs were no less (and at times more) pressing in early Christianity than in the religions surrounding it, and therefore purity concepts could not be dispensed with.

Second, the divide between external and internal, ritual and moral, is a product of a critical, polemical viewpoint, rather than a neutral and objective one. Moral meanings of rituals as distinct from the rituals themselves are rarely contemplated in societies in which the rituals are totally unproblematic; this is as true of the Hebrew prophets or Greek sceptics as of early Christians. However, while the former called upon these distinctions when speaking to their own religious group, the Christians (and other late ancient religions) used them against groups from which they were differentiating themselves; this created the danger of a double standard, in which the moral/ritual distinction was applied only to the rituals of others, not to their own rituals. In Christianity, the polemical distinction accompanied the upheaval and eventual demise of the former cultic systems, and was integrated into the emerging Christian thought-world. Christian ritual thought thus crystallized around a basic tension, between the realities of ritual as exterior happenings and the idea of a ritual/moral, external/internal divide.

The study comes to its conclusion with Origen, as the culmination of trends which gathered strength from the first to the third centuries. But in many

respects, Origen is also the inaugurator of a new period in the redefinition of purity and defilement. Looking forward to the fourth and fifth centuries, purity discourse continues to develop. The flourishing of the monastic movement brought radical sexual and alimentary asceticism, serving to purify the individual, to the center of attention. The extensive literature on these subjects continued to develop the theoretical and practical perspectives of purification through asceticism. In parallel, the advancement of church hierarchy, architecture, and rituals meant that baptism and eucharist became more intricate and structured rituals, with significant purity dimensions. These developments, which set the tone for the status of purity in the late ancient and medieval church, are rooted in the redefinition of purity and defilement formulated in the writings of the second- and third-century writers.

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